

THAT ROBBER.

BITTERSWEET, HESTER S

Ballou's Monthly Magazine (1866-1893); May 1872; 35, 5; American Periodicals
pg. 427

THAT ROBBER..

BY HESTER S. BITTERSWEET.

WHEN I was young, and wanted to be beautiful—but was too much freckled for that—I set up a pedagogical career in the wilds of the wide West, at Teetersburgh, Tipton County, on the Great Cumberland Road—if anybody, at this late date, remembers where and what that used to be. This was previous to the era of western railways

I must be allowed to premise, that staging was, in those days, and on the above-mentioned road, “a peculiar institution.” We rolled smoothly to our destination, it being summer, in a stage-coach, and anywhere from four to fourteen horses, I well recollect, loomed upon our unaccustomed vision in astonishing force, both as to number and size. The aborigines called them beasts.

During the transition period of fall and spring, people did journeys in an indescribable lumbering instrument of torture, adapted to the horrible condition of the Cumberland highway, and popularly recognized as a mud-wagon. In winter, the stage consisted of a crockery-crate filled with straw, the mails, and the Jehu of the day.

Occasionally, the winter line was enlivened by a variation in the shape of a hogshead securely headed up and hung on wheels, bung-hole uppermost; the latter sufficiently

enlarged to admit the body of the driver. This, when the streams were swollen and the fords unsafe. As very little snow ever fell in the vicinity of Teetersburgh, runners seldom came into requisition. Passengers were, of course, out of the question, in the last-mentioned mode of conveyance.

Miss Gildersleeve was my assistant. I had picked her up in the course of my somewhat protracted journey. She was one of Governor Slade’s teachers, thoroughly-trained, agreeable, furnished with excellent credentials, and, I am free to confess the fact now, beautiful. Wild horses could not have dragged the admission from me then, however.

Miss Gildersleeve gave her name as Kate. I called her “Prudence Catherine”—I had my reasons. That was her baptismal prenomen, a fact I lost no time in unearthing. Besides, she hated it.

We soon had a prosperous school built up about us, and, I feel proud to add, a good one. We should have scorned to succeed without merit. Equally, *with* merit—on the part of my assistant—we scorned *not* to succeed. We threw our whole souls into the enterprise; Miss Gildersleeve, with the spirit of an evangelist, and I, with that of a

practical financial pioneer. And we accomplished wonders.

We took lodgings at the one parsonage of the town, with a certain Rev. Theophilus Babe, home missionary at large to the surrounding heathen, and rector of the solitary Teetersburgh church.

Our room, it is proper to state, was situated in what is called a "leanto," at the back of the parsonage. This wing, or addition, consisted of the family kitchen, an open porch, and, at the furthestmost extremity, the apartment devoted to our use. The latter opened upon the porch, but had no other communication with the dwelling.

Pretty much everything ailed that room, I should say. It leaked, it smoked, it rattled and banged. You could devote yourself to astronomy through the siding. There were yawning chasms in the floor, and, the pastoral pigs being given over to domicil underneath, the consequences are not to be publicly discussed. But our pet abomination and torment was the one window, which would never open, and the door, which would neither open nor shut. What ailed that door, as I observed to Prudence Catherine, was, that it was too big.

"As also too little," returned Prue.

And too thick and too thin, we both agreed.

We hired a man to chop it off at the bottom, then to saw it away at the top. We had it chiselled down at the side, and the latch altered, and the hinges tinkered. Everything we ordered done made it a little worse than before. Still it shrank and swelled, and stuck and sagged, in the most inconsequent and aggravating manner.

A certain somnambulic delirium-tremens walked our neighborhood in those days, who, under the hallucination that he was fighting Satan, suddenly developed a taste for stepping into people's houses at midnight and tapping them on the head with an iron cross-bar.

"Some things can be done as well as others," I remarked to Prue, "and I propose to close this apartment to-night, or die."

The ensuing evening we cajoled the Rev. Mr. and Mrs. Theophilus into our sanctum, and instituted a futile round of general mechanical experiment. In grand finale, we precipitated ourselves, *en avalanche*, upon the refractory door, which miraculously sprung together.

Along towards midnight, the clerical Babes

gathered up their dignity and withdrew out of the window, as did Prue and I for the next fortnight; the avalanche idea, even, failing to effect normal entrance and exit.

Now I, for one, am not a person to be meekly assassinated in my bed, and "make no sign." Not I! Accordingly, I employed the watches of one tempestuous night to put in programme a new-fangled alarm-gong, of my own device. The very next evening, I proceeded to fix and test my plan, by practical experiment.

I procured a kettle, which I filled with scrap-tin, tenpenny nails, and a half dozen horse-bells, more or less, opened our door at a suitable angle, and adjusted the apparatus upon the top, allowing it to lean slightly at one side against the wall. The door, by the by, opened at the head of our bed and folded back at right angles with it.

That night I retired to a triumphant couch covered with glory, and convinced that whatever might happen, *we should know it*.

We *did* know it, alas! None so well! Dear me, yes!

I had quite forgotten the alarm. I was half asleep, I suppose, when, at some slight stir upon the porch outside, I instinctively thrust out my arm and gave the door a jar. Down came the gong on my defenceless head.

In five minutes the parsonage overflowed with startled Teeterburghians of an inquiring turn of mind. In five minutes more it was developed and bulletined, that I had contracted an awkward dint upon one cheekbone, had parted with two teeth, had my left temple scalped, my little finger broken, and a doctor's bill of probably about twenty dollars on my hands.

Next, at Miss Guildersleeve's suggestion, we tried on a small dog. A miserable insipid investment he proved. His name was Julius Caesar, naturally.

It was Julius Cæsar's forte to fly, at uncertain intervals, into high dog-hysterics, from which nothing but something good to eat would deliver him. We took a little heap of bones to bed with us regularly, at night, and tossed one at the creature every now and then, devoutly wishing it might choke him—which, of course, it never did. On the contrary, he thrived frightfully.

We sold Julius Cæsar; we gave him away; we lost him; we did all three repeatedly. We catalogued that branch of our friends upon whom we conjectured a small dog might be bestowed, I getting up the first half of the

list down to the n's, and Miss Gildersleeve completing it.

Armed with a system, we took Julius Caesar in hand, alternately, on Friday nights, when the school week was ended, gave him an extra polish, tied a bright ribbon about his neck, led him away like a pet poodle, and —and disposed of him. The next Friday night, there he would stand, to be disposed of again.

The week upon which our holiday vacation was to commence, something happened. The Teetersburgh crockery-crate ploughed into town from the east, with a passenger perched, in orthodox fashion, atop, back to back with the driver; his feet trailing off behind the clumsy vehicle, as did those of the other before it.

Both Jehu and the Little Blue, a river to be crossed some three miles beyond, chanced to be uncommonly high that night. In consequence, the westward bound mails were despatched from Teetersburgh in Noah's Ark, the hybrid hogshead conveyance already mentioned. Noah's Ark once put upon the line, there was no guessing when it would be taken off. The unlucky passenger, Mr. Peter Newbold, found himself stranded, accordingly, for an indefinite time, upon our shores.

After the manner of cultivated genius out of pocket, the new arrival immediately proceeded to found a boy's school, which he shrewdly bolstered up by the sounding title of Newbold Institute. Being an eastern bachelor, he further prosecuted vigorous acquaintance with the two Yankee schoolma'ams, Bittersweet and Gildersleeve.

Peter Newbold turned out to be a near-sighted, goodish-looking, easy-going young fellow, without much money capital, strikingly unpretentious in dress and manners, and yet withal an ambitious character in his way.

The young teacher commenced business with great flourish of patronage and promises. By-and-by the former began to fall off. Gradually the school decreased in numbers to twenty. Then to twelve; to five; and so on. Finally, census reports *per* the young Quaker, Gehazi Brown junior, returned Newbold Institute as consisting of "me and another fellur;" adding, *post-scriptum*, "and the other fellur aint tha-ar." No more was Gehazi, in fact.

A certain rival institution of male learning flourishing in our midst, may, it is true, as

Miss Gildersleeve insisted, have had something to do with Peter's vanished patronage. The latter school was specially adapted to attract young savages. The head master advertised to graduate a boy when he could "read and spell in three syllables;" and such like.

Notwithstanding, winter at an end, and spring mud-wagons revived, people began to wonder why Newbold did not "move on." He was out of money, as he loudly protested. And he had no business whatever. As for myself, I suspected Peter Newbold. Don't ask me what of? I absolutely couldn't say. I suspected him upon general principles of—*anything*. In fact, when a man, no matter who, has no more stamina than to be carried away by a pretty face as that man was by Prue Gildersleeve's, I politely decline to believe further in him.

Prue, reserving her own opinion in the premises, listened to my strictures with a face exactly the color of my hair; which is fire-red, or was so until—. But, never mind.

I did not consider it necessary to sacrifice Mr. Newbold's really delightful society to an idea. He continued to drop in at the parsonage, therefore, coming almost every evening at last. It was the old story over again. He talked and read aloud to us, and we listened, stitching or crocheting. At odd times he treated me to a game of chess, or accompanied Prue's fine voice with his flute, an instrument he managed very respectfully. At the first available opportunity, let me not omit to mention, I endowed the gentleman with Julius Caesar.

At about this time the old Quaker, Gehazi Brown senior, gave a sort of evening entertainment in honor of Mr. Newbold. Quite as a matter of course, he extended invitations to the Yankee schoolma'ams. Everybody born east of Teetersburgh was a Yankee to Gehazi. And he hated Yankees. In the abstract always.

Being in funds, our school-term having but just ended, I resolved not to be outshone, but to assume every stitch of style I could lay hands on, east or west. What if I had freckles, and scars, and red hair! I ordered white kids, and a lovely pair of white satin boots, from home direct, and ransacked our own neighborhood for ribbons and fans, bouquet-holder, essences and embroideries, including the minutest, cobwebiest, killingest, and most unboundedly useless, love-of-a-handkerchief that ever was.

We went to the party together, Prue and I; she looking divinely in a superannuated black silk and lace ruffles. But goodness! she'd have been divine in anything.

We stood up solemnly along the wall like so many wooden figure-heads, or perched ourselves, like the others, upon the two beds in the angles of the mammoth keeping-room; studying life, and staring disguisedly. We couldn't help it!

Ladies in calico aprons and astounding laces! Ladies in artificial flowers and cow-hide brogans! Sallow Hoosierines, well up in every description of chill-fever, but indifferently posted in the article of fashion, and sadly down at the heel in point of manners. "When you are in Rome," etc., etc.—if you are a schoolma'am.

By-and-by, we allowed ourselves to be attracted into the vortex of "Snap and catch 'em," and "Simon says." Precisely not the thing for starch and cobwebs; but la!

Our host asserted a grim proprietorship in us by chucking us under the chin occasionally, and ordering us to say "buckut." He kept a "wagon-house," which means an informal sort of country inn, and he had a pail conspicuously suspended from the boughs of a magnificent tulip-tree overshadowing the old-fashioned well-sweep. The traveller who denominated this object a *pail*, was a Yankee, and the house was not for him. To buckuters alone, did Gehazi senior extend potential hospitality.

In due time, Dame Gehazi stormed upon our classic sports, armed with—I really don't know what it was!—something loaded at each end with a small hay-stack of pie.

"Dried apple and green apple," the lady kindly explained with her chin, and "take which thee'd ruther."

To eat pie in lavender silk and embroidered kids—without a plate! To my eternal disgrace be it recorded, I shamelessly lied; pleading a toothache, though devoured with curiosity and hunger. The dame charged on down the line, and I was fain to take up with gingerbread and cheese out of my stylish gloves. Served me right!

There was Prue Guildersleeve meantime, a shining star in the trumpery old gown and ruffles. And there was Peter Newbold, following her about from Dan to Beersheba, like a raving distracted lover, and at the same time calculating in his own mind, I did not doubt, the value of her gold watch and chain, and perhaps planning, at that very

moment, to get into our room and rob us of the little sum of school money we were known to have by us.

In fact, I managed to have a plain talk with Prue Guildersleeve upon the subject, before we left the place that night, as I was resolved she should bring home no suspicious character under *my* patronage. And I told her so, point-blank.

Miss Guildersleeve listened in her most elaborate company-manner, bowed her acknowledgments, and stepping into the carriage Peter had just driven around for us two, whirled away with him.

"Temper?" La! I was speechless with fury. At the same time, I felt myself more deeply assured than ever, that Peter Newbold would eventually find his level in State prison. Or perhaps on the scaffold! Say the latter.

"Wouldn't I accept?"

"No! I would *not* accept!" I believe I left no doubt upon anybody's mind of *that*.

Home I strolled, on foot and alone, charging ruthlessly in party *chassure* through mire and water over my ankles, and asking myself where was the use in being a prosperous teacher and the proprietor of a female seminary, if I was always to have blazing hair and freckles.

Julius Cæsar trotted up behind me from somewhere, and thrust his cold nose into my hand, but with my white satin toe I resolutely sent him spinning to another section of the highway. I tore the ribbons and roses out of my hair and danced upon them. And I kneaded my gingerbread gloves into a white kid cannon-ball, which I fired with all my might into surrounding darkness. I never wanted to see them again, at any rate.

I reached my room in a state, to be sure; flung off my draggled finery, secured the fire, which the Babes had kindly kept up against our return, "put out the light," and without speaking to Prue, or saying my prayers, or looking under the bed, even, I bundled into the latter with a millstone at my heart; wishing I was a grizzly bear, or a crocodile, or a small dog, or even Dame Gehazi entertaining an evening party with "green and dried," and "take which you'd ruther."

I lay for some time tossing and fuming, and turning over and over again in my mind the things that had been said and done among us that evening.

I recollect in particular, how deeply interested Peter Newbold had shown himself

in the details of my finances; for I had distinctly overheard him leading Miss Gildersleeve on to remark, quite confidentially, of course, that she thought my last school term had netted something like three hundred dollars, and that there being no bank or deposit in our neighborhood was a great inconvenience.

Of course it was an inconvenience! Any idiot would know that! For a few minutes, however, I felt that it would be rather refreshing than otherwise to be robbed and murdered, and perhaps scalped out of hand. I was not going to part with my money to Peter Newbold, though! Not by any manner of means!

While writhing and plunging about, I imagined I heard a faint stir somewhere. Perhaps the sound came from the porch. But then I was always falling a victim to unaccountable noises at night, and at all events it did not really matter. Nothing mattered to me now, I ruminated, dolefully. A woman covered with scars, with freck— and— and red—at which point I trailed off into a short nap, I suspect. Then it was three in the morning by the school clock. We had brought it to our room to keep in order during spring vacation.

This time, there was, unmistakably, something out of the common going on close at hand, and, apparently, in our own room. Every now and then, I distinctly heard a person breathing quite near me, softly, yet heavily, like a man. The sound seemed to proceed, as well as I could make out, and, in point of fact, it actually *did* proceed, from underneath the bed in which we were lying. I listened, affecting to be asleep and undisturbed.

Meanwhile the sound in question became gradually more perceptible, increasing in volume and irregularity, from minute to minute. My abnormal relish for being tomahawked decreased, it is needless to remark, in precisely the same ratio.

Had I been alone, I should forthwith have stepped out of bed and run for it, and have been caught flying, if at all. But I could not forsake Prue Gildersleeve at such a moment. It was not in my nature to desert my best friend in emergency, if we *had* tiffed a little because she had stolen my rightful beau—much good might he do her! My hair began to creep on end with terror. Still I managed not to shriek outright.

Ever since I could remember, I had been

on a ravening search for a robber, or an incendiary, or a murderer, or a first-class ruffian of some description. I had spent months of my existence, I suppose, put it all together, charging into closets, and stabbing under beds with brooms, and umbrellas, and pokers, and such like. Even in the midst of my distress, I was pestered by the whimsical reflection that my “thief in the night” had, after all, stolen a march, and fallen upon me unawares.

The intruder, whoever he might be, still continued to breathe louder and louder, at each instant, and was plainly falling, by quick degrees, into an out-and-out-snore. He was evidently being overtaken by sleep; induced, in part, by the sultry atmosphere of the place, in part, by the long waiting brought about by my fit of protracted watchfulness, and in a great measure, no doubt, by spirituous potations.

At what time the fellow had effected entrance there was no telling, as a man might walk in, and walk out again, at his leisure, and nobody be the wiser. On the other hand, it was not difficult to guess what had brought him there.

We had, secreted in our room, at this time, a sum of money, amounting to nearly four hundred dollars, and belonging to Prue Gildersleeve and myself. Besides, we owned, each of us, a valuable gold watch and chain, to say nothing of certain expensive articles of jewelry in Prue’s possession; though these latter she had the good sense to display but seldom.

True, no one but myself knew exactly, either how much money we had laid by, or where it was concealed, my roommate having preferred, for reasons of her own, to remain unacquainted with these particulars. Still, our own private business being everybody’s business, according to the “tricks and manners” of small rural towns, it was quite widely understood that we had collected a good many bills recently, and that in all probability we had money on hand, as there were no banking facilities convenient.

There was no fear of our money; that was out of harm’s way. Weeks before this, I had, with infinite pains and circumspection, disposed of it. Having removed a rickety brick or two from our tumble-down chimney, I had placed within the cavity thus produced, a small securely-fastened box, containing our little treasure. Immediately afterward, chum and I had papered our room

with our own hands, thereby effectually obliterating all traces of my lone effort at masonry.

Plainly, I must awake Prue. That was the first step now. I dreaded lest in doing this I should arouse our unwelcome visitor. Before I ventured to make any movement toward the end in question, the fellow had commenced snoring tremendously, and was in imminent danger of awaking himself by his own voice. Prue Guildersleeve, though remaining perfectly motionless, was already on the alert.

"What is it, Hetty?" breathing out the words, rather than uttering them.

"It is Peter Newbold; come to rob us."

No comment from Miss Guildersleeve.

I drew myself up slowly, and felt cautiously along the wall at our heads, until my fingers came in contact with our two watches. These I at once unhooked, and we secured them upon our persons.

"He is drunk upon Gehazi's peach brandy," I volunteered; "but he may rouse up at any moment."

"O dear! Whatever shall we do?" entreated poor Prue, showing, for an instant, the white feather.

"Do?" I returned. "La, we'll walk away! And send him to State prison."

At the same time, there was my heart floundering about in my throat ridiculously.

"Now for it, Prue!" said I. "I shall spring out past the latch of that door. Then I will pull it open, and jerk it back till it stands straight against the bed. Don't stir till the door flies back, or it may hit and hinder you. When it does come, bound for your life into the porch, and we'll fly to the family-room."

"And the money?" whispered Prue, with true New England oversight.

"Safe! One, two, three, and away!"

As we forsook the apartment, we heard the thief scrambling about confusedly, as if too much bewildered by our sudden hegira to make the most of the situation.

Across the path into the kitchen, and we were safe and shivering. The outer kitchen door had no fastenings. We dragged a heavy table before it. Prue Guildersleeve propped herself between that and the cookstove, while I undertook to route up the Babes.

The family-room in which they slept, being a portion of the main building, opened in front of the kitchen, and was always kept locked at night.

Rap, rap, rap. No stir. Rap, rap, rap. Rap, rap, rap.

"Ugh! O! Eh?"

Rap, rap, rap, rap, rap.

"Halloo! Who's there? What's wanted?"

"It is we, Hetty and Prue. We want you to get up. There is a robber under our bed."

"How ye—ye—know?"

"We heard him. He was snoring there."

Not altogether unaccustomed to nocturnal surprises of a similar stamp, the Reverend Theophilus relapsed into a leisurely yawn, and but for a bracing reminder would have maundered directly back to the land of Morpheus.

"Well!" I remarked, tartly.

"Girls," says the Babe, "go to bed! You'll take cold!"

"Take cold," indeed! To us! who had a drunken deceiver lying in wait to take our lives! to say nothing of our "sacred fortunes." I treated the Reverend Theophilus to a perfectly pointed and transparent piece of my mind. "Blood will tell," they say. So will red hair, allow me to add.

"Well," says the Babe, "you haven't got on your earrings, I suspect. 'No?' You had better accept the hospitality of my greatcoat and the horse-blanket hanging in the corner there. Then I'll talk!"

Done.

"Yes," says Theophilus, waking up a little further, "it is one of his accomplishments to snore. Snores exactly like a man! I heard him once myself, or I would not have believed he could do the thing so cleverly."

"Snores like a man? Who?" put in Prue from her anchorage under the cookstove.

"O, well!" returned the Babe, with another yawn, "Julius Cæsar."

A set of Mrs. Babe's quilting-frames happened to stand that night in a corner of the porch. One of these I took in my hand, and with it I made a deadly onslaught against the walls of our forsaken apartment. Julius Cæsar responded briskly from within.

Permit me to avail myself of the storyteller's privilege, and draw a veil over that dog, what little there was left of him, at least, when I had finished my remainder of a cudgel upon his back. The last I ever saw of the nauseous brute, he was wending his wretched way, a sadder and a wiser beast, towards the lodgings of his quondam master.

For the remainder of the night, we harbored in the parsonage parlor, Prue armed with a butcher-knife, and I with a pepper-

box and a cross-cut saw. Had the Great Uninvited intruded upon us further, I proposed to treat him to condiments in the eyes.

The very next day, Peter Newbold left Teetersburgh for good and all. I, for one, was heartily glad of it.

He came to us, as in duty bound, to place the engagement ring on Prue's finger, and to compliment me with his adieux. But I steadily refused to see him. I said I was sick. And I *was* sick—at heart.

Miss Gildersleeve remained with me till the close of our second school year, when Peter came back, and took us both away, under his wing, to the East. There at Prue's home, the twain were made one. I forgave them both and was first bridesmaid.

Peter always calls his wife, "Kate, my dear." I do so myself, indeed. Especially of late years. "My friend Kate," I say, in speaking of her, "Governor Newbold's lady."

THE BIRD OF VICTORY.

Coomer, George H

Ballou's Monthly Magazine (1866-1893); Aug 1870; 32, 2; American Periodicals
pg. 132

THE BIRD OF VICTORY.

BY GEORGE H. COOMER.

It was the dawn of our second day at sea, and as the brig's royals became outlined in the gray light, old chanticleer awoke in his coop and gave a lusty crow.

"Ah, ha, old friend!" said "Man-o'-war Jack," "I have heard that sound when it meant more than it does now!"

To me, a green hand, it meant the barnyard, and the boiled beef and cabbage, and my Cousin Isabel and Mary Brown—in short, it meant "home." But to Jack, it meant the tall men-of-war, and the flashing guns, and the starry flag that would not droop in battle. Thus much for association.

"I call that fellow the bird of victory," continued Jack. "If he don't crow when an engagement is at hand, you may as well strike your bunting first as last."

"When I was in the Argus, in the last war, we had an Englishman aboard that was always blowing about roosters. That was the first I ever knew of the thing. Old Tom had been with Nelson. They had a big one, he said, aboard the Vanguard, and as they stood into the Bay of Aboukir to engage the French, he crowed all the time. It was the same with a game fowl at Trafalgar. They had one aboard the Victory, with a comb, Tom said, as wide as his hand; and just as she ranged up alongside of the Redoubtable, he hopped on the mainstay, flapped his wings and sang out, 'Brit-an-nia r-u-l-e-s the w-a-v-e-s!' and every one aboard knew that the French ensign was as good as struck from that minute!"

"Tom was afterwards in the Guerriere when she was taken by the Constitution, and in that way he got into our service. He said that while the American frigate was bearing down upon them, the Guerriere's rooster wouldn't crow. The tars tried to encourage the fowl and get a prophecy from him against the Yankees; but he was as obstinate as old Balaam when he took up his parable against Balak. They set him on the mainstay, and on the night-heads, and in every good place they could think of, as much as to say, 'Curse me them from thence!' and one old fellow, named 'Liverpool Bill,' took to crowing himself, hoping that the rooster would

understand what was wanted and follow the example. Once, Tom said, the fowl opened his mouth, but he only made a noise like a choked pump, as if he had a bone in his throat—and so the Guerriere was taken!

"Of course, Tom said, they didn't, as a general thing, have roosters running about the decks of British men-of-war; only when an engagement was expected they let them out in order to encourage the crew. Well, as I was saying, this was the first that I ever heard of such a thing; but after Tom had spun his yarn, our chaps in the Argus began to take a great deal of notice of a good-looking fowl that we had in the coop; and when Lieutenant Allen found that there was a superstition among us about the rooster, he wouldn't have the fellow killed.

"We cruised a couple of months in the chop of the English Channel, and at last fell in with the Pelican, a John Bull craft that I have good cause to remember. As soon as she was made out to be a brig-of-war, we let the rooster go about decks 'on leave'; but he behaved just as Tom said the Guerriere's game fowl had done, and there was no crow in him. At last, when the English brig was so near that we could see the shadow that her topsails made on the water, some of our chaps caught the bird and poured a dose of gunpowder and rum down his throat; but instead of crowing, he just fluttered upon the rail, tumbled overboard and floated away, keel up!

"There," says old Tom, "if any of you chaps has got any will to make, you may as well call up the chaplain to witness it. It's not old Tom as says 'die,' while he can swab out a gun; but he 'as his thoughts as well as a better man. That rooster, as we hall made so much dependence on, is hunder water—mind that. Not as old Tom cries 'peccavt!' but the truth's the truth, and a man can't 'elp some things!'

"You all know how the battle went; the Pelican cut the brig to pieces, and we soon had Dartmoor—inside! But how that rooster should have known what was to happen, passes my comprehension!"

"After a time, I was sent home in a cartel,

and had hardly set foot on the dock in New York, when Uncle Sam had a job for me. He was about sending three or four hundred sailors up to Lake Champlain, and I was invited to take a ride. Off we started. There wasn't a railroad then in the world, and we went with two-horse teams, and four-horse teams, according to the tonnage of the different land crafts. It was a sight, mates, to see us! We hailed everything on the road, and threw dollars at every old lady who looked as if she needed a new set of canvas. Away up in the country, where nobody knew but that a ship was a thing that had feathers, the people stared at us as if we had been a colony of terrapins going to look for fresh water. At the taverns where we rounded to at night, we frightened every one with big yarns about killing the English.

"Didnt it make you feel bad to kill the poor creeters?" says one old lady.

"No," says "Sprits'il-yard Jack," "it didn't, ma'am, only I spoilt this knife; that old bo's'n's windpipe was as tough as a bobstay!"

"So the old dame thought that Jack had really killed a boatswain, and sawed off his head with a dull jackknife! It would have been as tedious as freezing a chap to death with a southerly wind!"

"One morning we fell in with a gawky boy carrying something in his arms. I suppose he heard us roaring out all manner of salt water ditties, and the fellows in the headmost craft hailing the crafts further astern; so that he felt a little shy about bearing up for us, and began to edge off.

"Come alongside!" says we.

"I'm willing to come alongside of good water!" he says; and with that he brings to.

"The thing he had in his arms was a rooster, and a fine-looking fowl it was, too, with spurs like a marlinspike. 'Calico Ben,' one of our chaps, asked the boy if he would sell it; and while the lad was telling that he should have to tax us thirty cents for it, because he had just 'gin' twenty-five and brought it a mile, old Ben crammed his great hand into his pocket.

"A mile? that means a knot, don't it?" he says. "That's no great shakes of a tack to run. Here"—and he poured a fistful of dollars into the fellow's hand—"go home and buy your mother a new gown; and every time she looks at it tell her to remember the Hornet and Captain James Lawrence! Give me the rooster! Fill away, coachman; this

fine chap is going up to see Commodore McDonough!"

"Off we went; but old Ben knew no more what to do with his rooster than he would with a doll-baby, nor half so much. We chaps that had been in the Argus, objected to taking the fowl aboard the fleet, for he was just such a fellow as we had lost the brig by; but Ben said, on the other hand, that he was the very picture of the one they had in the Hornet; and so, as the Hornet was too hard for the enemy, we called the chances square, and after some grumbling, Ben was let alone with his bird.

"At last, one afternoon, as the coaches mounted a hill, we saw the masts of the fleet off Plattsburg. Pretty soon we made out the stars and stripes, and then the long black hulls below them. O mates! you can't think what a cheering there was from all the land crafts that we rode in, as they went rolling one after another over the hill. We had grown tired of that kind of sailing, and wished to get aboard of something that we knew better how to handle. There they lay—the old Saratoga, with Commodore McDonough's broad pennant, the brig Eagle and all the others.

"Next day I was sent off to the Saratoga, and so was 'Calico Ben.' Somehow he managed to get his rooster aboard the ship; but the officers took the fowl and put it in the hen-coop. We didn't have to wait long for the British. On the third day after I swung my hammock, we saw them standing for us, the Confiance frigate taking the lead. As soon as we made them out, Commodore McDonough signalled the fleet to clear for action; and when everything was ready for the fight, we stood at our guns and watched the enemy as he came down. Commodore Downie's pennant was at the mainmast of the Confiance. Ashore, we could see Indians and redcoats. So we waited; and though it wasn't very long, it was a kind of waiting that was hard—it weighed right down upon a man's heart.

"After a while, 'Calico Ben' stepped to the mainmast with his hat off, and the commodore asked what was wanted.

"I beg your pardon, sir," says Ben, "but I brought a game fowl aboard, and he's in the hen-coop. We had the like of him aboard the Hornet, sir, and as we was a runnin' down on the Peacock, we asked leave to let him out on deck, and the very first thing he crowed, sir; and as all the world knows, we

sunk the Peacock, What I would like to ask, is permission to give this chap a trial, sir, and let him speak for himself?

"So you were in the Hornet, my man?" says the commodore. "You are a brave fellow, no doubt. O well, you can give your fowl a trial."

"The bird came out, looking as if he wished himself in a barnyard, stretching up his neck and wondering, I suppose, what sort of a chance there was to fly home; and I think the commodore repented of giving the permission, for it was plain that the old salts had a great deal of superstition about the matter; and now if the rooster shouldn't crow, after all, it might make a difference to the Saratoga.

"Well, he walked about and shook himself, and when anything interfered with him he would give a sort of 'carrah!' and jump sideways like a dancing master; but there was no crow.

"I wish the blasted rooster was overboard!" says the captain of my gun. "What do you think he knows about the battle? Look at the enemy, won't you? and let the other game fowl alone!"

"'Jack, Jack!' says a fellow in the maintop over my head, leaning down towards me, 'they've got one, yonder, too! That big Britisher's got a rooster; I can see him on the pipe-rail by the foremast!'

"'Silence!' I heard the captain of the top sing out.

"By this time the British fleet was close down upon us, and the vessels taking up their stations. Before the *Confidence* had swung to her anchor, we gave her a broadside. At the same time the *Eagle* right astern of us engaged a brig, and the little one and two-gun sloops along the line buried themselves in smoke. But the *Confidence* was a heavy ship; she had thirty-nine guns to the *Saratoga*'s twenty-six, and we had our hands full. How she did cut us up! But we sent her the solid shot as fast as she wanted 'em, and I tell you, mates, the thing stood about neck and neck. Right in the midst of all the noise, I felt like laughing once, for my chum, the young fellow in the maintop, leaned over again, and says he:

"'Jack, we've fetched that rooster! We've knocked the pipe-rail to splinters and sent the fowl clear up to the foreyard!'

"I felt like singing out 'hurrah,' but other things didn't look that way. If John Bull's game fowl was gone, I remembered that our

own hadn't crowed—so the chamees stood about equal in that respect, but otherwise the *Confidence* had a little the advantage. Every one of our spars was riddled, and the yards hung like the top-hamper of a broken umbrella; and at last we hadn't a gun on the side next the enemy that could be fired. The eighteens and twenty-fours lay crosswise, and endwise, and sidewise, just as it happened, and all among them, and under them, and across them, lay men wounded in every way you can think of, some dying and some dead.

"Well, we must get the other broadside to bear, or the battle would be lost. We cut the cable ahead and let go a stern anchor, and the *Confidence* did the same, for she had only two or three guns that could be brought to bear on us as she lay, and everything with the Englishman depended on his being able to wind his ship, just as it did with us.

"It seemed as if the *Saratoga* would never pay off. We expected to see the Englishman go around, for he was trying hard, but somehow he remained pretty much as he was, and so did we. At last, when no one was thinking of such a thing, and just as we was a heavin' taut here and a castin' off there, and a watchin' for the ship to swing—right out of the main rigging there sounded a tremendous crow! It was just as if it had said 'Hurrah for B-r-o-t-h-e-r J-o-n-a-t-h-a-n!' We looked up, and there was old Chanticleer just stretching his neck to crow again.

"'This ship will pay off!' says 'Calico Ben.' 'That red bunting over yonder hasn't got much longer to air itself! It's pretty near daybreak with Brother Jonathan when his rooster crows!'

"And he spoke the truth, mates. From that moment, the ship began to wind around, and we soon opened a fresh broadside. John Bull could do nothing; and when he found there was no hope of winding his ship he struck his colors.

"After the battle, the commodore gave 'Calico Ben's' game fowl the liberty of the deck; and when peace was concluded and they trundled us back to New York, we took Mr. Chanticleer along. On the road, we fell in with the same gawky boy that Ben had bought him of, and all on a sudden the rooster found himself back in the barnyard. Whether he knew where he had been or remembered anything about the battle of Lake Champlain, I can't say.

"The boy's mother was a widow, and poor

enough at that; for we found the sheriff and another man just driving her cow away from the door, and the widow a crying. So we rounded the sheriff to and fixed up that matter with some of our prize money; and then we asked the widow how much it would take to set her on an even keel; but she cried worse than ever and began to spin a yarn about our

kindness. Well, our chaps tumbled into the house, hat in hand, and every man put his fist in his pocket and rattled out a pile of dollars. We told the widow to take good care of the game fowl that fought with McDonough, and then we made sail.

"Let's have your pipe, Tom."

THE POWER OF A SONG.

Churchill, Lide

Ballou's Monthly Magazine (1866-1893); Jan 1874; 39, 1; American Periodicals

pg. 65

THE POWER OF A SONG.

BY LIDE CHURCHILL.

"By the love we cherished, by the hopes that perished,

By the smile that ever answered mine,
Give, O give some token, ere my heart be broken,
That will lead my weary soul to thine."

THE beautiful queenly head was erect, the bosom rose and fell, and the glorious dark eyes were full of passion as the singer's voice floated forth, filling the apartment with matchless melody. The song was finished, and Clemence Worthington moved away from the piano, but for a moment there was a stillness like the hush of death in the room, for no one stirred, or scarcely breathed. The spell which that almost divine music had cast over the brilliant throng assembled in Mrs. Sinclair's elegant drawing-room could not be thus easily dispelled. At last the silence was broken by a gentleman who had stood near the instrument.

"How gloriously she sings! It would

be no hard matter for one to imagine himself in heaven while listening to such music as that."

"You are right," replied the lady addressed; "and I always feel when I listen to her as if she *meant* what she sung, for she sings with so much feeling."

But where was the girl, or woman, rather, whose wonderful voice thus held captive the senses of that restless crowd, and caused each listener to forget time, place, everything but that he was listening to strains as sweet as were ever drawn by the capricious breeze from the far-famed *Æolian harp*?

She had passed from the house to the garden, leaning on the arm of a tall, dark, handsome man, and now, when the pale moon and twinkling stars look down on the sleeping flowers, she is listening to a tale of love as passionate and ardent as the heart of Carl Delisle can dictate.

"Clemence darling," he says, as he presses the little hand which lies so confidingly in his until the rings on her fingers cut the tender flesh; "I did not mean to speak to you of my love until my return from Europe, when I hoped to have something to offer you beside; but while you were singing, your voice thrilled me through and through, and I knew that I must speak or die. Clemence, I shudder when I think how madly I worship you, for has not God said, 'Thou shalt have no other gods but me?' And I fear, ay, I know that I love you better than anything in heaven or on earth. But you do not answer by word or look; is it possible that you do not love me? Speak at once, my beautiful one, and tell me if you will be my wife."

There was a world of tenderness in those dark magnetic eyes, as Clemence Worthington lifted them to Carl Delisle's face, and said, in that low sweet tone he loved so well to hear:

"Carl, you ask me to be your wife, but I will not promise now. I do not deny that I love you with my whole heart, and I would ask no greater blessing than to know that I was wholly yours. To-morrow, dear Carl, you start for Europe, to be absent three years. If, when you return, you can come to me and say that no other woman has listened to words of love from your lips, and that you love me then as fondly as now, I will become your wife whenever you wish. I will not bind you by a promise; I leave you free as air. It remains with you whether I ever become your wife."

"Then I am sure to win you," he cried, "for no other woman will ever hear a word of love from me."

He folded her in his strong arms, and kissed her cheeks, lips and forehead, and after once more declaring that he loved her beyond everything else, he released her, and they returned to the drawing-room, and mingled freely with the guests for the rest of the evening. And that night they parted for three years. * * *

Italy! Land that inspires the poet's song and the artist's pencil! land of cloudless skies and balmy breezes! Dear, dreamy, delightful Italy, our story next opens within thy sunny limits!

It was evening. Flowers sent forth their fragrance on the dewy-night air, and the golden stars hung over the beautiful earth.

Along a lane thickly bordered by shrubbery walked Carl Delisle, but he was not alone, for on his arm leaned one of Italy's fairest daughters. She was very beautiful, with her clear dark skin, dark, dreamy, passionate eyes, and superb form. Carl Delisle knew that Cornell Pernoé loved him, for every act of hers showed it. For many months he had seen her daily, and he was fascinated, intoxicated by her wondrous beauty, until he believed he loved her. To-night, at this romantic hour and in this romantic spot, he determined to tell her of his passion, and ask her to become his wife. He had taken her hand, and words of passionate entreaty sprang to his lips, but ere he could utter them, from a house not far distant came the sound of a piano, and a clear rich voice sang:

"By the love we cherished, by the hopes that perished,

By the smile that ever answered mine,
Give, O give some token, ere my heart be broken,
That will lead my weary soul to thine!"

The hand he held was suddenly dropped, and the words he was about to utter died on his lips. He saw before him in imagination a brilliantly lighted drawing-room, and a sea of human faces, but fairest among them all, the sad but beautiful face of Clemence Worthington. He remembered the scene in the garden, and he remembered her words, too: "If, when you return, you can come to me and say that no other woman has listened to words of love from your lips, and that you love me then as fondly as now, I will become your wife whenever you wish." How near he had come to losing her! The thought made him shudder. His companion had been listening to the music, and did not notice his agitation, but she wondered what made him so silent as he walked home with her.

That night, ere he sought his bed, he wrote a long tender letter to Clemence, in answer to one which he had received from her some months ago. He told her all, and humbly begged her pardon for ever being untrue to her even in thought. Half a year after this he returned home, and soon after became the happy husband of the peerless Clemence. He often asks his wife to sing the song which saved him from a life of misery, for, without her love, he declares it must have been so. Who shall estimate the power of music?

Ellis, Clare

Ballou's Monthly Magazine (1866-1893); Feb 1874; 39, 2; American Periodicals
pg. 128

THE VALENTINE.

BY ELLIS CLARE.

CHAPTER I.

THE Rectory stood on one side of the road, and the linen manufactory was on the other, just on the banks of "the silver Bann." Sloping verdant hills lay around, generally—at all events during the sunny season of the year—decorated with the linen in process of being bleached. A little way from the manufactory, and with its orchard skirting the river's bank, stood an old-fashioned, substantial-looking, gray stone country-house, standing in the midst of trimly-kept grounds. In the summer time the roses clambered in wild profusion all over the walls of the house, and peeped in at the wide windows; but at this season of the year there were no roses to peep in, for it was a bleak dreary afternoon in February, with the wind whistling and driving the rain against the windows. But, supposing there had been roses to peep in at the windows, he would have been very hard to please who could have wished to look upon a prettier face or form than that of Gracie MacAlister, who, seated on the hearthrug in the drawing-room, in a position more indicative of comfort than elegance, was holding a most animated dialogue with a pleasant delicate-looking lady, who was lying on a couch by the fire.

Dialogue? Monologue, rather; for Miss Gracie hardly gave her placid, gentle mother any opportunity of putting in a word. Perhaps it was not to be wondered at, seeing that she was telling her mother all about that momentous event in the life of a young lady—her first "grown-up" ball.

"And O mother dear," she cried, "if you could only have seen the headdress Mrs. Harley wore! Why I think it had all the plagues of Egypt upon it—flies, and locusts, and reptiles of all kinds."

"Gracie, you should not be satirical," said her mother.

"And, mother," continued Gracie, heedless of the remark she had just heard, "I made the same observation to Willie Crosbie; and he said Mrs. Harley's headdress was nothing, as there was another lady in the room far more daring, for he verily believed she had a scorpion on her head."

"Will you ever get sense, Gracie?" interrupted her mother.

"Well, really," resumed Gracie, "Willie took me to inspect this wonderful animal; and we concluded that it was either a scorpion or a crocodile."

"Get off the hearthrug, Gracie," said her mother. "You are scorching your face; and besides, you are too old to be sitting there like a little girl. It is not a dignified position for a young lady just 'come out.'" And the fond mother looked proudly at her lovely daughter.

"Mother dear, I am sorry you were not able to come to the ball last night," said Gracie. "I should have enjoyed it twice as much as going with Aunt Jane; but I assure you I was very proper, and didn't flirt a bit more than was absolutely necessary."

"You saucy girl!" exclaimed her mother. "Was it absolutely necessary to flirt at all?"

"O dear, yes!" replied Gracie. "You know it was an officers' ball, and of course I was obliged to flirt just enough to let them think what an agreeable member of society I am."

"What an agreeable member of society you are!" repeated her mother. "Why, do you suppose any one of them will give you a second thought?"

"Indeed I know one who will," said Gracie, turning her bright eyes laughingly on her mother—"and such a nice man too; only I am afraid he did not consider me quite grown-up."

"That must have been very trying to your feelings," observed her mother, dryly. "May I ask what led you to come to that conclusion?"

"O, he told me at one time that he thought I had much better sit down, as he was sure I was tired."

"I dare say he—whoever 'he' is—was quite right," said Mrs. MacAlister.

"Yes, I was a little tired," confessed Gracie, "so I sat down for a while; and he talked to me just as if I were a baby."

"Why, what did he say?"

"He asked me if I was not looking forward very anxiously for to-morrow, as it is St. Valentine's Day. And I said, not par-

ticularly, as I knew who would send me valentines, and I did not care for them. Then he said he would send me one if I would answer it. So I agreed to do so. Won't it be fun? Don't look so shocked, please, mother."

"Gracie, Gracie, you are a dreadful girl! You must not think of doing such a thing."

"But, mother, I promised; and, if he sends me one, I must send him one, too. He's quite nice," she continued, anxious to prepossess her mother in her admirer's favor; "he is Captain Edgar Vilmar, of the —th Rangers."

"No matter who he is, dear; you should be more reserved in your conversation with gentlemen. Come to luncheon now, and then go to your practising afterwards."

"It's too bad," soliloquized Gracie, as she dashed off a brilliant "Mazurka," "to think I may not answer his valentine; and he's the nicest man I ever met—and an officer, too. I wish I could see him and tell him. I am sure he will keep his word, and of course he will think me horrible to break mine." And Gracie thought that to be considered "horrible" by Captain Edgar Vilmar would be very dreadful indeed.

Gracie MacAlister was the only daughter and heiress of Mr. George MacAlister, the owner of one of the large linen manufactories which are so common in the north of Ireland. She was just past seventeen, a blithesome innocent girl, gradually ripening into womanhood. She had a perfectly shaped oval face but faintly tinged with color, which was, however, fully made up for by the rich coloring of the prettily curved lips, and by the delicately pencilled eyebrows that surmounted a pair of lovely violet-blue eyes. She was of about the middle height, and a mass of soft wavy brown hair crowned her well-shaped head.

Gracie played on, her thoughts all the time running upon the probabilities of Captain Vilmar's sending her a valentine. One minute she wished he would do so—she thought she should like him to think about her again; then the next minute she wished he would not, for of course she could not send him one in return. Her mother had been lecturing her during the whole of luncheon time, and presenting her conduct to her "mind's eye" in such grave colors that poor Gracie felt ready to cry with shame and vexation.

"How do you do, Miss MacAlister? I would not let the servant announce me, as I wished to hear that pretty set of waltzes you were playing." And the subject of her thoughts advanced towards the alcove where the piano stood.

"Captain Vilmar! Does my mother know you are here?"

"I really do not know," he replied. "I seem to have disturbed you?"

"O no, you haven't disturbed me!" said Gracie; "but what a dreadfully wet day for you to come out!"

"I called to know how you enjoyed your ball. You had great fun, hadn't you?"

"Yes, I enjoyed it very much," said Gracie, adding to herself, "Dear me, what a baby he thinks me!"—then aloud, as her mother entered, "Mother, this is Captain Vilmar, the gentleman I was telling you about," she continued, to her mother's extreme annoyance, who very naturally did not wish that any man should have it in his power to say that her Gracie had been thinking of or speaking about him.

"I am happy to see you, Captain Vilmar," she said. "I presume you were one of my daughter's partners last night. It was her first ball, and she has been quite enthusiastic about it."

"She seemed to enjoy herself thoroughly, at all events," said he, looking at Gracie with a smile, much as one looks at a pretty spoiled child.

Mrs. MacAlister—self-possessed woman of the world—managed to engross nearly the whole of the conversation. She had no intention of allowing Gracie to have any more private or confidential interviews with this man until she knew something about him. The longer she conversed with him the more she wondered at the conversation Gracie had repeated to her; for Captain Vilmar did not look at all like the kind of person to trouble his head about such nonsense as valentines. He was a tall distinguished looking man, of about three-and-thirty; dark complexioned, and with a face which would have been decidedly plain but for the rare smile which now and then illuminated it, and lit up the honest brown eyes; the mouth was shaded by a thick drooping mustache, the rest of the face being shaved *a la militaire*. Gracie felt rather proud of her admirer; she thought he was a great deal nicer than Mr. Hawkins the curate, although Mr. Hawkins

had lovely, fair, curly hair, which he parted down the middle; and nicer than Willie Crosbie, who was the son of a neighboring manufacturer, and a devoted admirer of Gracie's; and she felt sure that, since he had taken the trouble to come and see her, he would not forget about the valentine.

Captain Vilmar soon rose to go, but not before he had obtained permission to call again—a circumstance which greatly delighted Gracie. Her satisfaction was oblivious enough to secretly annoy her mother, and very much please Captain Vilmar, who sat that evening in his sitting-room at the hotel nervously penning a few honest, manly, loving words, which Gracie's bright look when saying farewell that afternoon had given him courage to write.

“Jessie,” said Mr. MacAlister to his wife, as they sat alone together that night after Gracie had gone to bed, “I received a proposal of marriage to-day for our Gracie.”

“From whom?” she inquired, eagerly, her thoughts reverting to Captain Vilmar.

“From Mr. Marmaduke Osborne,” he replied. “Certainly he is much older than Gracie, but it would be a splendid match for her.”

The mother's eyes glistened; Mr. Osborne was closely connected with the aristocracy, and moved in the best society—many a titled mother would willingly have given him a daughter in marriage—and a proud woman was Mrs. MacAlister when she heard of the proposal. At last that for which she had planned and schemed all her life seemed within her grasp; for, despite her husband's reputed great wealth, she had failed in gaining admittance within the charmed circle of high life—being the wife of “a manufacturer,” she was by common consent ostracised. She did not reflect that the man to whom she was willing to give her pure innocent young daughter was old enough to be that daughter's grandfather, and that he was a noted roue and gambler besides. No, she only thought that she would be enabled to hold her head higher than other mothers in her station in life.

“Where did Mr. Osborne see Gracie?” she inquired.

“At the ball last night.”

“By-the-by,” said Mrs. MacAlister, “that reminds me—a Captain Vilmar,

whom she met there, also called here to-day, and I really think Gracie seemed quite to encourage him.”

“Nonsense!” returned Mr. MacAlister, in a tone of annoyance; “she must put all such ideas out of her head. I know what these military men are—a set of fortune-hunters.”

“Then I assure you he and Gracie seemed to have made rapid advances,” said Mrs. MacAlister, “for there was some talk of valentines between them.”

“I wonder at you, Jessie!” exclaimed her husband, now thoroughly angry. “You know I told you a year ago that Gracie must make a good marriage.”

“But I thought, dear,” said the wife, nervously, “that all occasion for that was past. Are not your affairs in a more settled state?”

Mr. MacAlister hesitated; he almost shrank from telling his wife the real state of the case, but he knew that without her help nothing could be done in the matter. Gazing gloomily, so as not to meet her gaze, he said, “No—affairs are worse than they have ever been. The new machinery that has just been put up at such enormous expense is lying there idle; next to nothing is doing in consequence of this talked-of war.”

“But, George dear, will not the soldiers want linen?” asked the wife, thinking she was saying something comforting.

“O, you women understand nothing about business!” he replied. “However, you can help me if you like.”

“How?” said she, eagerly.

“By bringing Gracie round to marry Osborne,” was the reply. “I know girls have sentimental notions, but you must get them out of her head. He has plenty of money, and I have no doubt will be glad enough to lend me some if he thinks he can get Gracie.”

“I shall do my best,” said his wife. “Gracie ought not to require much persuasion; it would be a most brilliant marriage for a girl in her position.”

“Mr. Osborne is to dine here to-morrow,” continued Mr. MacAlister; “so prepare Gracie to make herself agreeable to him. And mind, I'll not have any flirtation or nonsense with that officer fellow. If he comes here, just give him the cold shoulder.”

“Let me manage it,” said Mrs. Mac-

Alister. "She shall marry Mr. Osborne, and she shall have no more to say to Captain Vilmar."

CHAPTER II.

"WELL, only fancy, mother, Captain Vilmar never sent me the valentine, after all."

"You see you were too sanguine, dear," replied Mrs. MacAlister. "Gentlemen do not consider themselves bound to fulfil all the promises they make to young ladies."

Gracie thought she was very sorry that Captain Vilmar did not fulfil his promise; she would just like to have seen what kind of a valentine he would have written. She had thought very much of the grave earnest face that morning as her maid was weaving the bright hair into the wondrous network of plaits which adorned her pretty head.

Captain Vilmar had also thought of his plain grave face, and had wished that for Gracie's sake it was a handsome one; he knew it was not the face to take the fancy of a bright young girl. Yet no woman ever looked into Edgar Vilmar's face without trusting him; it was the face of a man who could not be otherwise than gentle and chivalrous towards women. He wished his valentine "God-speed" and a favorable answer, little dreaming that it was to be snugly hidden away in a secret drawer of Mrs. MacAlister's *écrin*.

Yes, that was the fate of Captain Vilmar's valentine; and, having transacted that piece of business, Mrs. MacAlister descended to the breakfast-room, and, kissing Gracie, ate a hearty meal than she had eaten for some time past.

"Perhaps, on the whole, mother, it is as well that Captain Vilmar did not send me a valentine, because I could not send him one in return, as I promised," said Gracie, who could not help reverting to the subject now and then.

"It is much better that he should not send you one," replied her mother; "and it's just a lesson to you, my dear, not to heed all gentlemen say."

"But I really believed him, mother," said Gracie; "he looked like a man who could not say anything he did not mean. Perhaps," she exclaimed, suddenly, "I may get it by the afternoon's post!"

"O, don't trouble yourself any more

about him, Gracie!" said her mother. "Do you know that Mr. Osborne is to dine here to-day?"

"That disagreeable old man!" exclaimed Gracie. "He followed me about at the ball the other night, and wanted to dance with me that time I sat down with Captain Vilmar."

"Gracie, do not speak so disrespectfully of Mr. Osborne," said her mother; "he is a most valued friend of your father's."

"Why, mother," said Gracie, looking puzzled, "we hardly know him!"

"He is to dine here to-day," continued her mother, "and your father and I particularly request that you will make yourself agreeable to him."

"So I will, mother," replied Gracie; "and, if Captain Vilmar sends me a valentine I'll exhibit it, and say from whom it is; for I saw Mr. Osborne looking quite spitefully at him the other night when we went off together."

"Gracie, you must not say anything about this Captain Vilmar," said her mother. "The truth is, Mr. Osborne has proposed for you, and your father and I give the marriage our fullest approval."

"I—marry—Mr. Osborne!" slowly ejaculated Gracie. "Why, mother, he is a dreadful old man! Surely you and papa do not wish me to marry him!"

"My dearest child," said Mrs. MacAlister, "you know we are only anxious to secure your happiness; and we feel sure that Mr. Osborne will make a most affectionate and excellent husband. I cannot understand your refusing him; half the girls in the county would be glad of such a chance."

"I am quite willing to give him to half the girls in the county," returned Gracie, petulantly.

"I hear your father coming down stairs," said Mrs. MacAlister; "pray do not annoy him by giving way to your temper in such a manner."

Mr. MacAlister entered and took his place at the breakfast-table in a preoccupied way. They were an uncomfortable trio—Gracie trembling and terrified, and longing, yet not daring, to steal away and ponder the news her mother had told her, Mrs. MacAlister anxious yet determined, and her husband careworn and depressed.

As the latter finished his breakfast he looked at Gracie, and said, with a ghastly

attempt at a smile, "So my little Gracie is going to be a lady, fit to hold up her head amongst the best in the county?"

Gracie did not answer, but the color mounted to her forehead, and she pressed her lips firmly together, as if to restrain herself from answering.

"Have you spoken to her upon the matter," he continued, addressing Mrs. MacAlister, "and told her of the honor Mr. Osborne has done her?"

"I do not consider it any honor!" exclaimed Gracie. "Surely, papa, you do not wish me to marry him?"

"My dear Gracie, you are young and inexperienced, or you would not speak so," said her father. "Mr. Osborne is a man of whom any girl might be proud—rich and well-born."

Gracie wondered if she was dreaming. Could it be possible that her parents wished her to marry that disagreeable old man? Surely it must be some horrible nightmare. Rising and standing beside her father's chair, she said, excitedly, "Papa, tell me all about it. I feel sure I do not rightly understand what you and mother mean."

An expression of pain shot over his care-worn face, giving it a haggard look. Without looking at Gracie, he motioned her away with his hand, saying, "Go away, my child—I want to speak with your mother."

She mechanically obeyed. She was right when she said she did not quite understand what her father and mother had been speaking to her about—she was stunned! Marry that old man! She recollects how she had tried to avoid him at the ball, and how grateful she had felt to Captain Vilmar when the latter had taken her away. She wondered if Captain Vilmar had seen that she was trying to avoid Mr. Osborne; she wondered what he would say if he heard she was going to be married; she wondered why he had not sent the valentine, as he had promised. In fact, Grace kept wondering and wondering, until her thoughts went back again to the ball; and, as she recalled various looks and tones of Captain Vilmar's, she wondered very much what they had meant.

Presently her musings were interrupted by her mother's voice calling to her to come down. As she entered the breakfast-room, she gave an involuntary start of surprise at the appearance which her father pre-

sented. He was seated in his usual place, his form bent, and his hands hanging listlessly on the arms of the chair. Raising his eyes, the expression in them of despairing entreaty went to Gracie's very soul. Desiring her to sit down, he drew a letter from his pocket, saying:

"Gracie, I've been a good father to you?"

"Yes, papa," she said, in an amazed tone.

"And your mother and I have always tried to make our little Gracie happy?" Gracie assented. "Then, to please us, we hope our Gracie will accede to our wishes, and marry Mr. Osborne."

"Papa, papa," she cried, wildly, "do not ask me to do that! I'll do anything else to please you."

"You could not do anything else which would give us half so much pleasure," said her mother. "What are your objections?"

"O, because he is so old, and I should be so unhappy," she replied. "I could never love him—O, I cannot marry him! Please, please, papa darling, do not ask me!"

"Gracie," said Mr. MacAlister, in an odd constrained voice, "would you like to see all of us leave our own dear home, and go forth into the world without money, and very likely without friends?"

"No, papa. But why should we? Can Mr. Osborne send us away?"

"Far from that—he can keep us in it. Gracie, I am a ruined man. You cannot understand all about it, but I want money very badly, and, unless you marry Mr. Osborne, I do not know where to look for it."

"Cannot you get it at the bank, papa?"

Mr. MacAlister made an impatient gesture, and, tapping the letter with his finger, said, "Will you marry Mr. Osborne or not? I must have your answer before I reply to this letter. Will you have your mother and me cast as beggars upon the streets?"

Gracie gave a faint little cry.

"Don't—don't, papa! Yes, I'll marry Mr. Osborne—tell him so. Perhaps—perhaps something will happen, so that he will not ask me."

"But he has asked you," said her father, "and he means what he says; so mind you be attentive to him when he comes here this evening."

Mrs. MacAlister herself superintended

Gracie's toilet, and very lovely she looked, notwithstanding the sad troubled look in the sweet violet eyes. She was dressed in pale blue, whilst costly pearls gleamed on her white neck and fair rounded arms. She passively received Mr. Osborne's attentions—she did not repel, neither did she encourage them. The enamoured swain was upwards of sixty, short, stout, florid-complexioned, and with scanty gray hairs fringing a bald, round, bullet-shaped head. He was pompous and egotistical in his manner of speaking, and, it seemed to strike Gracie, decidedly patronizing toward her father and mother; but what most repelled her was the hard sensual look in his little cunning gray eyes. She felt her heart grow sick within her.

"So the Rangers are ordered off?" said Mr. MacAlister.

"I believe so. Our hospitable entertainers of the other evening will soon be dancing after the enemy instead of after the pretty girls," said Mr. Osborne, looking at Gracie with an idiotic leer intended to be killing.

Mrs. MacAlister sent up an inward prayer of thankfulness, while little Gracie felt a sharp pain pierce through her heart and move her in spite of the stagnant apathy which had been gradually settling down upon her. And so he was going? Perhaps she should never see him again!

* * * * *

A group of officers were lounging in one of the windows of the Miltown Hotel; the waiter was distributing the contents of the afternoon's post-bag, and soon the group dispersed, leaving Captain Vilmar and the old gray-headed regimental surgeon the sole occupants of the apartment.

"Are you sure there was no letter for me?" asked Captain Vilmar.

"No sir," was the reply. And as the waiter spoke a handsome carriage drove past.

"Is not that Mr. MacAlister's carriage?" inquired Surgeon Speculum.

"Yes sir," was the reply. The waiter was fond of a bit of gossip, so he continued, "That elderly gentleman sitting on the front seat is Mr. Marmaduke Osborne, and I have just heard that he is going to be married to Miss MacAlister."

Captain Vilmar went for a walk. He knew, or fancied he knew, now why he had not received the promised answer. But

when had the engagement taken place? Certainly since he had seen her last, when she had looked at him so trustingly as she laid her little hand in his broad palm. The very thought of her touch thrilled through him strangely; he was soon going away to certain danger and probable death, and he felt that he should like dearly to feel once more the gentle pressure of that tiny hand. But—but was she not the affianced bride of another man? When he recollects that, this brave honest gentleman almost felt ashamed of his own thoughts, and told himself that it was a just judgment upon him for falling in love with a little girl whom he had seen only two or three times.

CHAPTER III.

"MOTHER dear, I wish you would not ask me to go to tea to the Rectory tonight," said Gracie MacAlister, about a week after the events just recorded had taken place.

"Don't be absurd, Gracie!" returned her mother. "You know Mr. Osborne will be there; and what would people say if you were absent?"

Gracie sighed wearily and acquiesced; she did not care much, as far as she was herself concerned, what people thought upon the subject—she only knew that she felt heartsore and terrified. Mr. Osborne's pleadings for an early day to be fixed for the wedding seemed to make the whole dreaded affair so horribly real, and the constant state of excitement in which her mother managed to keep her had so worked upon Gracie's mind, that she longed earnestly to be allowed to spend that one evening quietly by herself.

No one could say that the Rev. Mr. and Mrs. Dorner might be ashamed to meet their greatest enemy in the gate—for a family of seven blooming daughters had blessed their union. Therefore, taking that circumstance into consideration, it is not to be wondered at—that Mrs. Dorner took quite a motherly interest in the officers of the —— Rangers—poor young fellows, living there in a hotel, deprived of the congenial atmosphere of home, etc., etc.!—hence two or three of the defenders of their country might be seen hovering about the Rectory any time between luncheon and supper-time. And no wonder, either; for the rector's daughters were

nice, pleasant, good girls, who always dressed and looked very much alike—as far as personal attractions were concerned, the Misses Dorner were chiefly remarkable for a superabundance of adipose tissue and fair hair. Added to the foregoing inducements, the rector's wine was excellent, and Mrs. Dorner was a gem of a hostess, possessing the charm of making every one feel perfectly at home.

"We are so glad to hear of your engagement, Gracie, and we all wish you every happiness, dear," said Miss Dorner to Gracie in the hall.

"Mr. Osborne is here, Gracie, and all the gentlemen have been congratulating him, except that stuck-up Captain Vilmar," supplemented Mary Dorner, a bright-eyed girl of about Gracie's own age.

Our little heroine felt a vivid blush overspread her face, and her heart beat fast as she entered the drawing-room of the Rectory. Never had she looked more lovely, and, as Mr. Osborne ostentatiously placed her on the sofa beside himself, her eyes met those of Captain Vilmar, who was earnestly gazing at her with a tender pitying glance; she held out her hand to him, and, coming forward, he silently pressed it, and then returned to his station by the piano.

Mr. Osborne was, under any circumstances, an officious lover, and laboring under the influence of the rector's famous wine, his face looked redder than usual, his round bald head glistened in the wax-light, and his voice sounded thick and husky. Gracie felt towards him an indescribable loathing. O, if he would only leave her! She thought it would not be so bad if he even kept at a distance. Captain Vilmar's was not the only pitying eye turned upon her that evening; and a proud and grateful little girl was Gracie when Miss Dorner asked her to come to the piano and give them some music.

Gracie played; and when somebody came to take her place at the instrument she managed to slip unnoticed into a corner, out of the ken of her mother and her betrothed. Two of the Misses Dorner were vigorously executing the overture to "Zampa," yet, to her ear, more distinctly than the music sounded Captain Vilmar's voice, saying:

"Will you pardon my seeming impertinence in sending you a valentine, Miss

MacAlister? I would not have presumed to do so had I known you were engaged."

Gracie looked at him in blank amazement. She was correct when she said that he looked like a man who meant what he said. The grave good eyes looked at her with the same tender pitying light in them, and Gracie felt that she trusted him with her whole soul.

"Did you really send me the valentine?" she asked. "I never got it."

"I sent it," he replied. "I cannot account for your not having received it."

"I never got it," she repeated. "What could have become of it?"

"Never mind it—perhaps it is just as well," said he, quickly, the probable fate of the valentine flashing across his acute mind.

"But I will mind it. I was so sorry not to have received it," said Gracie, innocently.

A keen pang of delight shot through Edgar Vilmar's heart at her words. Bending over her, he said in a low tone, "Were you engaged to Mr. Osborne on St. Valentine's morning?"

Gracie turned ashy pale as she answered in the negative.

There she sat, his little white lamb, his little love—the affianced bride of another man! There was no one near to listen to him, so he might have told her of his love, might have disturbed her mind, might have flirted with her; but, instead, the brave honest gentleman went over to where Mrs. MacAlister was sitting, and saying, "Miss MacAlister is not well; I think she wants you," at once left the Rectory.

The next morning, as the sun rose from behind the smooth green hills, Gracie lay tossing wearily on her couch, when the gay strains of a military band broke upon her ear. She then knew that the — Rangers were leaving Miltown, and Gracie turned upon her pillow and wept.

CHAPTER IV.

GRACIE's wedding took place on Mayday—as lovely a day as could be desired. The sun shone as if there were no breaking hearts in the world; it radiated through

The sainted figures
On the casement painted,
and flooded the wide chancel of Miltown church, where were assembled the group

of gay guests who were to bear witness to the moral murder about to be committed.

A slight bustle amongst the guests; some one is entering the church. O, it's only the bridegroom! Few men look to advantage on their wedding-day; and Mr. Osborne, never very prepossessing in appearance, looked still less so on this particular occasion; for, feeling himself to be the cynosure of all eyes, he became proportionately redder and more nervous. At length the bride arrived, leaning on her father's arm. She advanced up the church, her sweet sad face as colorless as the pure white silk dress she wore. Soon all was over, and Marmaduke Osborne and Gracie MacAlister were pronounced man and wife.

Broad and rich lands lay around Netterton Hall, Gracie's new home. It was a stately building, replete with every luxury that wealth could procure. Yet, with all, it is almost superfluous to state, Gracie was not happy. Her mother's glowing anticipations did not seem likely to be quickly realized. Despite his "high breeding," Mr. Marmaduke Osborne was tainted with the vulgar vice of "stinginess," and many a time Gracie felt the hot flush of shame rise to her forehead as she saw her husband—in a perfectly legal but despicably mean manner—mulct a poor servant of part of his or her hardly-earned wages—for hardly-earned they were sure to be at Netterton Hall. After a scene of the kind, which took place one day about a year after their marriage, she endeavored to remonstrate with her husband, when he turned angrily upon her.

"You do well to speak, madam," he retorted. "Recollect that you married me to save your family from beggary. Ask your father to pay me the money he got from me, and then I may perhaps afford to be generous. O, Marmaduke Osborne was not such a fool as he appeared, and as you will one day find to your cost!"

"How dare you speak to me in that manner?" she exclaimed. "Have I not been a good faithful wife to you?"

"Ha! I should like to find you anything else," he replied. "But I know you don't care for me, any more than you do for the chair on which you are sitting."

Gracie sank back, speechless with terror. "Come, come," continued her husband, "none of your airs or graces with me, madam. I know well that you don't care

for me, your lawful husband—I know that you never cared for me, and I am sure that you care for some other man; deny it if you can!"

"I do deny it!" she cried, indignantly; and, poor girl, she honestly believed what she said. "I have tried hard to feel towards you as a wife ought, but—but—"

"But what, Mrs. Osborne? Pray go on—I am listening to you."

"For Heaven's sake, stop, Marmaduke! In what way have I failed in my duty towards you?" she cried.

"Listen to me, Mrs. Osborne. Have I not seen you sitting quietly, and a soft loving look come into those wonderful eyes of yours—a look which faded out of them quickly enough whenever I spoke to you? Have I not watched you at the piano as you sat playing low sweet music, and the color came and went in your face, and I knew by your eyes that your heart was not here? And have I not noticed your feverish anxiety to see the daily papers? Ah, you may start, but deny all this if you can! However, you shall bitterly regret the day you ever deceived me and became my wife."

"I bitterly regretted it long ago," she said; "your jealous surmises are only surmises, after all."

"Then why did you marry me?"

"To save my father from ruin! There! I confess it now. But I never deceived you—I never professed to love you."

Her husband fastened his cold malignant gray eyes upon her with an expression which froze her very heart's blood, and said, sneeringly; "O, you did, did you? An affectionate father he has proved in return!"

"I do not wish to discuss that matter," she said, coldly, and rose to leave the room.

"But I intend that you shall discuss it, and that fully, madam! Sit down," he said, pushing her roughly into a chair. "Do you know," he continued, "that this property is entailed, and that, should I die without leaving a son behind me, it passes to a very distant connection? Your affectionate father was so anxious to have you married to me that he took no trouble about marriage settlements, and the money that would otherwise have been settled upon you was made over to him to prop up his failing business, so that, should you be

left a gay widow, you will also be a penniless one."

"I don't want your money!" she exclaimed, passionately. "I would not touch one penny of it. I shall leave you, and go back to my father!"

"Ask leave first. Mr. and Mrs. Osborne are a most united couple in the eyes of the world—a perfect Darby and Joan—and so we shall continue; don't dare to make a scene and have my name spoken of in the neighborhood!" he cried. And with this parting injunction, Mr. Osborne left the room.

His miserable wife tottered to the sofa and buried her face in the cushions. Her husband's surmises were every one correct—she, wretched woman that she was, had been trying to stifle and keep down the yearnings of her heart; but at times it would break from her control, and an overwhelming passion for sympathy and congenial companionship would utterly overcome her; and then, in spirit, she saw a plain grave face and a pair of tender pitying eyes, and her swift thoughts flew over the sea, and she saw the red field of battle, heard the cannon booming, saw the flower of England cut down, and through it all her mind's eye followed one stalwart form; then—then the mental picture became horribly vivid, and, as her husband had remarked, she feverishly scanned the records of carnage which day by day appeared in the newspapers, unutterably thankful when each day passed over and no mention was made of the name she so eagerly sought for.

Another summer passed away, and the autumn that ensued brought many changes. Mr. MacAlister failed utterly in business, and a stroke of paralysis was but the consummation of the end which he had been anticipating many months before. In the midst of her grief for her father, the autumn brought a daughter to Gracie, much to the annoyance and disappointment of her husband, who anxiously wished for a son; but an end was soon put to his disappointment, for the baby was hardly two months old when Mr. Osborne was carried home one night cold and dead. He had been thrown from his horse while returning in a state of intoxication from a dinner-party, and concussion of the brain had ensued.

CHAPTER V.

AFTER the death of her father, her mother had come to live with Gracie—forced to do so by the very urgent reason that there was nowhere else for her to go to; the old home of Gracie's childhood and youth had therefore passed away. With the death of her husband the means of subsistence for herself and her child were likewise gone, and the affairs of the estate having been wound up, she found herself the possessor of but a few hundred pounds in the world, while a delicate mother and a helpless baby looked to her for support.

Gracie Osborne sat alone by her child's cradle one night a short time after her husband's death. Her bright silky hair was plainly banded beneath that hideous head-gear, the conventional widow's cap, her black dress hung in heavy folds round her slight figure, and her almost transparently white hands lay listlessly upon her lap. There she sat thinking, thinking, thinking how she was to find daily bread for herself and her baby. At length she rose quickly, and, proceeding to her mother's bedroom, she gently opened the door and advanced towards the bed, saying, in a low voice:

"Are you asleep, mother?"

"No, dear," she replied; "is there anything the matter?"

"O no!" said Gracie; "I merely came in to say that I think I shall go over to the Rectory early to-morrow morning. I want to consult Mr. Dorner about some business."

"Very well, dear," said her mother.

"And I shall probably not return to-morrow night," she continued. "You will take care of my darling, mother?"

For answer her mother drew her towards her and kissed her.

Early the next morning Gracie ordered the carriage—now, alas! hers no longer—and drove to the Rectory, which was about seven miles from Netterton Hall. She was received with as much warmth of affection and free-hearted hospitality as in the days of her prosperity, each one viewing with the other to make her feel that she still held the same old place in their hearts.

"It is so good of you to come, Gracie. But why did you not bring the baby?" asked Miss Dorner.

"I come on business—that is why I am here so early," she replied. "I was afraid I should miss seeing your father."

"You are not going to speak about business until you eat a good breakfast," said Mrs. Dormer.

"Would you like to come and speak with me in the study, Gracie?" said Mr. Dormer.

"Not unless you wish it particularly," she replied. "The truth is, I came here to talk over my prospects, and to ask for some advice as to what you think I ought to do towards earning a livelihood for myself and my child." And, as the young widow said these words, the poor pale sad face flushed, and the tears welled up in the great violet eyes.

Of course all the good-hearted girls and their mother wept for sympathy. The rector blew his nose in a suspicious manner, and it was some minutes ere he said, laying his hand kindly on Gracie's shoulder:

"Don't fret, my child; thank God that he has put the thought into your heart. Work is no disgrace."

"But I don't know what work I am fit for," said Gracie, desperately. "I am not competent to become a teacher; and, even if I were, I could not leave my child."

"No, certainly not, poor little darling," was chorused by the girls.

"Quiet—quiet, now!" said the rector. "Could you not teach young children?"

"I dare say I could. I know I understand music well; but, as I said before, I cannot leave my child."

"Could you take pupils at home?" inquired the rector.

"Recollect, Augustus dear," interrupted Mrs. Dormer, "how very badly teachers are paid."

"I have thought of that myself," said Gracie, "and, as I sat thinking last night, an idea came into my head; but I am half afraid to broach it to you."

"Why should you be afraid to tell us anything, Gracie?" asked Mrs. Dormer. "Did you not come here for advice?"

"Come, Gracie, let us have the benefit of this very wise idea of yours," said the rector, seeing that she hesitated. "But, first of all, how much money have you?"

"Only between six and seven hundred pounds," she replied.

"What a lot of money, Gracie!" exclaimed Mary Dormer. "I don't see why you need do anything."

Gracie smiled sadly. Adversity had taught her a lesson; she knew that the

money she possessed was very good as something against a rainy day, but she knew that it would soon melt away unless there were something coming in for daily wants.

"I was thinking," she said, nervously looking from one to the other, "of opening some kind of business."

"Capital!" said Miss Dormer, energetically. "I am sure a good dressmaker's establishment in Dublin would succeed."

"What do you say to it, Mrs. Dormer?" asked Gracie.

"You brave little thing!" said the kind-hearted woman, rising and kissing her. "But what do you know about business, dear?"

"Nothing yet," she replied; "but I could learn. Some of your girls seem horrified at the idea."

"I am sorry they are so foolish and little-minded," said the rector, gravely. "I consider you deserve the highest praise, Mrs. Osborne, and I highly approve of your plan."

"And so do I," said Katie Dormer; "and when I'm going to be married I'll get you to make all my dresses."

"Katie says that, Gracie," put in another of the seven, "because she thinks you'll do them cheaply."

"Be quiet, girls," said Mrs. Dormer; "this is no laughing matter. We must see what can be done for Gracie."

Quietly and steadily the matter was talked over by Mrs. Dormer and her clear-headed practical daughters, and the result of their deliberations was that, as Gracie would leave Netterton Hall the following week, Mrs. MacAlister and the baby should be transported to the Rectory, whilst Mrs. Dormer and Gracie went to Dublin to see what could be done towards establishing the latter in business.

But a great many details had to be considered, and the Christmas snow was on the ground ere Gracie was installed in comfortable apartments in a leading Dublin street; and a respectable person, well known to Mrs. Dormer, engaged as general manager. The tenderly-reared Gracie Osborne was fairly launched upon the great ocean of life, to fight her way as best she might against the billows and breakers of trial which each one of us who ever means to breast the waves and gain the goal must inevitably meet.

CHAPTER VI.

PEACE was proclaimed. War was over. All Dublin seemed half mad with joy on that bright day in the early summer of 1856 when the joyful tidings were officially proclaimed in various parts of the city. Many a woman's heart sent forth a cry of thankfulness, while the men stood with heads reverently uncovered; and thanked the good God who had mercifully put an end to the slaughter which had made so many women childless and widows.

And then there came another day—a day on which some remnants of the war-worn regiments came home. The daily papers were loud in their praises of their valor and daring; and second to none in bearing away the palm for bravery were the gallant — Rangers, at the head of which rode Colonel Edgar Vilmar.

Gracie saw the expected arrival of the regiment announced in the newspapers, and she knew that on their way to barracks the troops would have to pass her house. Old memories arose and stirred the depths of her heart as she read Edgar Vilmar's well-remembered name; and then, sensible little woman as she was, she wiped away a few tears which would impertinently intrude themselves, and said to herself how foolish she was; for what could the great and brave Colonel Vilmar have in common with Grace Osborne, milliner and dress-maker?

But now the inspiring sound of military music was heard approaching, mingled with the "huzzas" of the crowd. Nearer and still nearer the music came. A blue-eyed baby came creeping along the floor, and one little hand plucked at Gracie's dress, while another pointed to the window, and a baby voice cried, "Mamma—come—mamma!" And Gracie obeyed, and the first face her eyes rested upon was that of Edgar Vilmar, plainer, mere rugged looking than of yore, but yet Edgar Vilmar, returned covered with glory, and apparently safe and well. She had only a glance at his face, and he passed from her sight.

After a short time sickness began to make havoc amongst the troops. Notwithstanding the cold wintry weather, fever ran high, and a rumor spread throughout the city that the brave and beloved Colonel Vilmar was stricken down by it and lay sick—sick even almost unto death. On Christmas Day Gracie knelt at her prayers,

and with trembling lips prayed "for all sick persons," and "for one—O, for one in particular!" and the prayer was granted. Edgar Vilmar did not die, though for many days he lay hovering between life and death.

Lady Beckham was one of Gracie's chief patronesses; she was a kind, bustling, lady-like woman, and the pretty pale face and gentle well-bred manners of the young widow had deeply interested her. Entering Gracie's show-rooms one day early in February, she said, laughingly:

"I have not been a very good customer lately, Mrs. Osborne, yet I am come now to ask you to do me a favor."

"I shall be happy to oblige you in any way in my power, Lady Beckham," said Gracie, who could not help liking the kind-hearted woman, who always treated her as a lady.

"Well," continued the lady, "my brother, Colonel Vilmar, is a great invalid, and I want to have a dressing-gown made for him out of this Indian material." And she displayed a costly piece of some gorgeous Eastern fabric. "I know it is not in your line," she continued, "but it is too costly to entrust to other hands to make up; so that is why I have asked you."

Gracie accepted the task, and no hands but her own pretty ones accomplished it. It was a labor of love, and truly the garment was baptized with many a secret tear.

The dressing-gown was just finished, and was to be sent home the next morning. Gracie was industriously working at some of the embroidery of the collar, when, to her dismay, she found that she had used up all the sewing-silk of the required color. What was to be done? It was late at night—all the shops were shut, and the garment was positively to be home before nine the next morning. Her exclamation of dismay roused her mother, who was dozing by the fire.

"What is the matter with you, Gracie?"

"What shall I do, mother? I have not silk enough to finish Lady Beckham's dressing-gown!"

"Is that all?" asked her mother. "Take my keys. I think there is some like it in my top drawer."

Gracie took the keys and ran lightly up stairs, opened the drawer, and there, sure enough, was the silk of the very color she

required. She returned to the room, and, her mother dozing off again, she soon completed her self-imposed task.

But what has happened to Gracie? The costly dressing-gown lay in a tumbled heap upon the carpet, as, with flushed burning cheeks, and eyes from which the hot blinding tears fell thick and fast, she read a few lines which were written on the paper round which the silk was wound. Ah! the tears were of joy, for at last she held in her hand Edgar Vilmar's valentine!

"He loved me! he loved me!" she cried. "I knew it—I felt he did! Heaven bless him, forgive those who came between us, and help me!"

She folded up the precious paper and placed it in her bosom, and, covering up the dressing-gown, left it ready with orders to be delivered at Lady Beckham's the first thing in the morning. * * *

"Take care, Davis—some paper dropped out of that dressing-gown. Hand it to me," said Colonel Vilmar to his servant as he unfolded the gorgeous garment.

He opened the paper, and, as he looked at the contents, could hardly believe the evidence of his senses. Yes, there it was

—his own valentine, in his own handwriting, addressed to the woman whose image was imprinted upon his heart, and the strong pure love for whom had kept him clear from many a temptation. He had only heard of her family's misfortunes and her husband's death just as the fever had stricken him.

"Do you know who made that dressing-gown, Davis?" he asked.

"Yes sir—Mrs. Osborne, Lady Beckham's dressmaker."

"Do you know where she lives?"

"No sir," was the reply.

"Then find out. And see here, Davis—have a car at the door for me immediately after breakfast, and be ready to come out with me without letting any one know."

He had found her—his little love—the one love of his whole life! And not many weeks afterwards the bells of Saint Anne's Church rang out a merry peal, and Edgar Vilmar and Grace Osborne were quietly married, the business of the latter having been entirely made over to the faithful woman who, as manager, had so carefully guarded and looked after her mistress's interests.

THE VINCENT MARRIAGE.

Willian, Camilla

Ballou's Monthly Magazine (1866-1893); Dec 1874; 40, 6; American Periodicals
pg. 545

THE VINCENT MARRIAGE.

BY MISS CAMILLA WILLIAN.

MR. VINCENT leaned back in his lounging-chair and looked out into the Park. Such a sunshine, such a soft cool rustle of foliage, such a fragrance of flowers, ought to be joyful; but to him they were inexplicably mournful. For he would never see the sunshine, nor the trees, nor the flowers of another summer. Perhaps before these were faded he would be buried out of sight.

The canaries sang joyfully in their cage, a lithe maltese cat made frantic bounds and leaps after a fly that had escaped the eyes of Mr. Vincent's pattern servants, and the shrill sound of childish laughter came in from a back street through the windows of the long suite of rooms. But they woke no smile nor gleam of interest in that pale grave face.

Thomas came in bearing a luncheon which he deposited on a stand at his master's elbow. A long purple bottle of Johannisberger, Rhine sunshine, condensed over the cellar of that storied castle, a sparkling elfish wine; a little French roll, light and snowy white under its amber crust; a glass dish with long strings of red currants like strung rubies, and a little show of grated cheese on a silver plate. Such was Mr. Vincent's delicate and simple luncheon.

Thomas shook out the napkin of deep-fringed damask, poured wine into a glass like a green soap-bubble, bowed, and withdrew.

Mr. Vincent just tasted the wine, drew a long string of currants through sugar, toyed with them a moment and forgot to eat them, then turned listlessly to look out again. It was a time when few were out who could remain in, for it was noon of a July day; but as he looked, a light quick step caught his ear, and presently a young lady came past the window and ran up the steps of the next house. A ladylike girl, rather, but not very pretty, and simply dressed. It was the Misses Raymonds' music-teacher come to give her pupils their lessons.

Mr. Vincent knew perfectly well what she was. He knew on what days she came, how long she stayed, and had marked, also,

that every time she came she was paler and more worn. No wonder, he thought; running from house to house in the heat, and training the dull fingers of misses who had not, perhaps, a grain of music in them, must be drudgery. Besides, he had a little romance about this girl which might also account for any faded roses. There was a young Mr. Raymond who had chosen to fall in love with his sister's music-teacher, and, report said, had been favored by her. Papa and mamma made short shrift of the matter. There had been a sharp engagement, then Mr. William was sent to Europe to learn a proper appreciation of caste, and Miss Vincent, for she happened to have the same name as our friend, attended to her pupils as before, though, perhaps, with paler cheeks.

Now, as she sat in Mrs. Raymond's parlor, trying to dim one of Chopin's murmurous waltzes into Miss Anne's stupid little pate and dexterous but inexpressive little fingers, there came a gentle ring of the doorbell, the parlor door opened and a servant brought a note in.

"How dare you bring a note in your hand!" cried Miss Anne.

"It is for Miss Vincent," explained the girl.

"O," said the young lady, as though that were quite another thing. "But how odd that a note should come here for you, Miss Vincent. What can it be?"

"It is from Mr. Vincent, next door, Miss Anne," said the girl, while Miss Vincent coolly opened it, "and Thomas is waiting in the vestibule for an answer."

The note was as follows:

"Will Miss Vincent allow me an invalid's privilege, and step into my house a moment when her lesson is over, since I cannot come to her? Or, if other engagements press, appoint a time when she will come?"

The note was signed Eugene Vincent.

"Excuse me a moment, Miss Anne," said the music-teacher, rising.

"Tell Mr. Vincent I will come in to see him in half an hour," she said, to Thomas, then returned to her pupil whom she found in the sulks.

"How came you acquainted with Mr. Vincent?" asked Miss Raymond, at length.

"I am not acquainted with him. Please go over that passage again. You should not spread that chord."

Miss Raymond rendered the chord with a bang, then returned to the charge. "But what in the world does he write you for?"

"That passage is piano. Now don't strike staccato, but soft and full, with diminuendo. The phrases should melt away."

"I shan't play any more," said Miss Anne, rising.

"Don't you care to?" said the teacher, tranquilly. "Then, Miss Frances, I can give the time to you."

Thomas opened the door for Miss Vincent as she came up the steps, and directed her into the room where his master was.

She stepped forward with some curiosity, for the few glimpses she had got of this man in passing his windows had deepened the interest excited in her by his singular case. Besides, she wondered what he could want of her. In the first dimness of the room she did not see him, but the next moment he was visible, leaning back in his easy-chair and asleep.

She stepped nearer, hesitated a moment, then with a half smile, seated herself and waited. She could not help watching, too, and photographing on her mind this man's picture. He was near forty, perhaps, handsome, dark-eyed and dark-bearded. The brown coat of tan which he had brought from his ten years in the mines and in wild western life had worn off, and the face was perfectly white, though not particularly thin. The form, only half concealed by his white linen wrapper, was tall and well-developed, and the feet, crossed on the ottoman before him, were almost too daintily made for a man.

There was no time to observe more, for, drawing a long heavy sigh, he opened his eyes.

"Heigho!" he yawned, dropping his folded hands upon his knee. "I wonder if that girl is coming in!"

"That girl is here, sir," said a quiet voice at his side.

He started, made a blushing apology, and proceeded to explain his reason for requesting her presence. He went out but little, he said, and was lonely and gloomy when in the house. He had no relatives, and

very few friends, no intimate ones, and consequently his time dragged, short as it was likely to be. He knew that she was a music-teacher, and thought that perhaps she would be willing to come in and play to him occasionally when her other engagements would permit. He had fancied that it might be less irksome to play than to teach, though, if she were peremptory, he was willing to be a pupil—ending with a faint smile.

Miss Vincent consented readily. She would be very glad if her music could be any relief to him. And since he needed her, and sat so lonely in his great house, she did not hasten to go. She sat and talked, and listened, and before either was quite aware, knew all the principal features in his life. He had been an only child, inheriting just money enough to finish his education. After graduating from college he had taken a sudden resolution to go to California and dig for gold in the earth, instead of trying to find it in a profession. He had been one of the few fortunate ones, and after ten years, had returned home with heavy trunks, large credit in several banks, and a regular income from his mines of a thousand dollars a week.

Full of life and hope for the future, he had invested his money, had bought and furnished a house, home being his first thought, and had begun to gather up his old acquaintances and to form new ones. There had been a grand house-warming that spring, a part of the week's festivities being a hunting party gotten up more for a lark than for the game they would get. A rifle in the hand of a careless friend had gone off accidentally, and a bullet entered Mr. Vincent's breast. Everything that science could do was in vain. The ball could not be reached, and, as time passed, grew more and more troublesome. There was sometimes a difficulty in breathing, a pain through the left breast, an irregular action of the heart.

There was a consultation and examination by the most noted surgeons in the country, who pronounced that the ball was lodged somewhere over the heart, was gradually settling, and would cause his death at no distant period. He must abstain from all exercise that was not absolutely necessary, and had better arrange his affairs at once. When death came it would doubtless be sudden, perhaps instantaneous.

And so Mr. Vincent, though a great walker, dared not walk, though a fine horseman, dared not ride, and his horses gnawed their mangers, and his carriages gathered dust, while he sat at home waiting for a piece of lead to drop into his heart and kill him. Not a very comfortable position, truly.

Miss Vincent listened to all this, and seeing the strong man so helpless before her, her pity for him, her admiration for him, also, and perhaps, some need in her own life, inspired her with a resolution. Whatever she could do to lift the burden of this dreadful fate should be done; and since he frankly described his loneliness and gloom, she would take on herself to cheer and amuse him. Mournful as the case was, a sense of exquisite pleasure arose in her heart as she contemplated it. It was beautiful to be useful to some one.

"I'm going to play something for you," she said, when he had done speaking. "May I take off my bonnet?"

He smiled, well-pleased that she should understand so well what he wanted. It looked homelike to see that light figure in its blue muslin robe and the shining braids of dark hair uncovered, seating herself so easily at his piano.

She played cheerful music, broke presently into a ringing march, then sang softly a German cradle-song.

Miss Vincent's touch on the instrument was fine, and her voice one of richest sweetness. Besides, in singing to an auditor who was not a dozen paces from her, she did not think it necessary to exert the full power of her lungs. Her voice never tired the ear, and so easily and gracefully she sang, that while listening to her, song seemed more natural than speech.

The cradle-song faded and fainted, and she half-turned from the piano. A voice arrested her:

"Let me drink in the spirit of that sweet sound!
More, O more, I am thirsting yet!
It loosens the serpent that care hath bound
Upon my heart to stifle it."

The last lowly-uttered word was lost in the earnest uprising of Mendelsohn's most beautiful hymn, "Lift thine eyes to the mountains whence cometh help."

"I have a lesson to give now," she said, rising. "But I will come as often as you like."

"You cannot come too often," he said, extending his hand to her. "This is the first relief I have had for weeks."

After this, Miss Vincent came every day, rain or shine. If there was rain, the champing horses had exercise, and the quiet boarding-house was astonished at the sight of a stylish carriage driven up to the door with or for the young music-teacher. Four weeks passed in this way, and the invalid grew daily worse. He lay on a sofa nearly all the time, and any sudden movement made his heart leap in great bounds.

Scarcely could the young nurse control her pitying emotions to show him a cheerful face. And she never went up the steps for her daily visit without a sinking heart for what she might find.

Meantime, gossips were not idle. That Mr. Vincent should like to be amused with music was not surprising, but that he show'd have selected a young lady performer wa' rather odd. But that was nothing to the liberty given her. The carriage sent if but a drop of rain fell, a latchkey to enter when she would, and unlimited power to give what orders she pleased in the house. Why, she even ordered Mr. Vincent's dinner at the market, and sat and ate with him.

"I'm sure," said Mrs. Raymond, indignantly, "Anne could play to him, and Mr. Raymond and I would be happy to go in and sit with him any time. But he never asks us."

Fortunately Mr. Vincent never heard nor suspected these things, and what Miss Vincent heard she treated with scorn.

"I have something to say to you, Miss Vincent," her patient said one day when she had stepped in to inquire for him before giving her lessons at Mrs. Raymond's. "You may think me very selfish, and I suppose I am; but I wish you would give up teaching. I want you to be here more."

She looked at him and hesitated a moment. Teaching was her whole support, and her brother Charlie's sole hope for an education.

"Then I will give it up," she said.
He smiled faintly.

"Sit here," touching a tabouret by his sofa.

She sank into the seat without a word.

"I have been thinking that the better way, if you could bring yourself to consent," he said, gently, taking her hand, "is for us to be married."

She started, grew crimson, and drew her hand from him.

"You can see," he went on in the same tone, watching her with his steady solemn eyes, "you can see that it will be but a short time, and I assure you that it will be but a form. By this, I can have you always here, spare you fatigue and remark, and provide for your future. I cannot tell you what a blessing you have been to me, and I cannot lose you now. You can have some friend to stay with you, if you like, only that I would like to have you without any stranger present part of the time, as now. Am I asking too much?"

The soft trembling hand was laid in his, and the lips quivered but could not answer.

"Of course, I do not speak of love," he said. "I have no thought of that. And our intercourse will be as it has been. You will soon be free to make yourself happy with the one you love. Will you think of this and answer me as soon as you can?"

Laura Vincent's face had grown deathly pale while he was speaking, and when he had ended she answered quietly:

"It shall be as you wish, and when you wish."

"Thank you," he said, gratefully. "May I say to-day?"

"Yes. And now I must go into Mrs. Raymond's. Perhaps you may change your mind about this, but it shall be as you wish every way. You speak of providing for my future. I will tell you what I will take, what I shall be obliged to take. I have now twenty pupils in music at ten dollars a quarter. Until I get as many pupils again, let that amount, eight hundred dollars a year, be paid me. I will take no more."

"Miss Vincent," said Mrs. Raymond, after the lessons had been finished, and after she had sent her daughters out of the room, "I am obliged, as a friend, to speak to you about your connection with Mr. Vincent. Your intimacy there causes great remark."

Laura was too full of weightier thoughts to be very angry. She merely said:

"I dare say you are right, Mrs. Raymond. There is a class of persons ever ready to remark upon others. Their remarks are of no consequence to me, except that I am sorry to see persons so low and so wicked. I do not care to listen to what they say."

"But I care," said the lady, sharply. "Your going there is extraordinary, and so

long as you are my daughters' teacher, you—"

"I am their teacher no longer," said the girl, haughtily.

"Indeed! What does this mean?"

"I wish you good-morning," was the answer. "I have no time to spare."

Laura Vincent's heart leaped into her mouth as she stepped into Mr. Vincent's parlor again. A group were gathered around the sofa, among them a clergyman, and a lawyer. Had he died, then, while she was absent? No; the group parted as she sprang forward, and met the sick man's smile. She would have retired immediately and in some confusion, but he called her to him.

"You do not repent your promise?" he asked, eagerly.

"No."

"And will fulfil it now?"

"Yes."

"God bless you!"

In ten minutes they were married, had received a warm clasp of the hand from each of their departing visitors, who dared not breathe a word of hope or congratulation over this mournful bridal, and were alone.

"Now I am at rest," said Eugene Vincent, sinking back and closing his eyes. "Everything is settled, and I have nothing more to do."

Laura Vincent looked at him a moment in silence, then drew the large family Bible toward her, and read St. John's recital of the Saviour's death, then turned and read a psalm, the 20th. "The Lord hear thee in the day of trouble."

He listened attentively, then, when she closed the book, whispered:

"Would you just as lief say a prayer, Laura?"

She knelt by his side, and while he held her hands, repeated the Lord's prayer.

But with the "Amen" her face dropped forward on his arm, and she burst into a passion of tears.

"Tender heart," he said, gently, touching her bowed head. "Don't grieve, Laura. I shall be well soon, and you will like to remember what you have done for me. Don't grieve, child!"

With a strong effort she recovered her self-control, got up, and smiled as she wiped her eyes.

"A woman must always make a scene,

you know, Mr. Vincent," she said. "Now it is luncheon time. What will you have?"

"I want something very nice," he said, rising to his elbow. "I am hungry; I have not felt so much like eating for a week."

"Should you sit?" she asked, fearfully.

"Why, yes, if I feel no inconvenience from doing so," he said; "and I do not."

While they sat over the luncheon, a servant came with the money which Mrs. Raymond owed Miss Vincent for her daughters' lessons, and requested a receipt.

"She said I'd be likely to find you here," said the girl, pertly.

"Where else should you find her?" demanded Mr. Vincent, haughtily, looking at the girl with eyes that made her shrink.

Laura wrote the receipt, hesitated, then signed "Mrs. Eugene Vincent," a name that struck consternation and dismay to Mrs. Raymond's heart when she read it. To offend the wife of Eugene Vincent was the last thing that politic lady would have wished.

Mr. Vincent's marriage changed him in more than one respect; it cheered his spirits at the same time that it made him less careful of himself.

"I feel that it would be cowardly of me to lie here longer," he said. "When I am not suffering pain I mean to go about. Of course, I shall avoid violent exercise, but I must not vegetate any longer."

So they took moderate walks, Laura anxiously measuring every step, they went to church, and sometimes to concert or theatre, and they rode out, though the doctors shook their heads. No harm came of it.

One day, when they were riding, the horses took fright, and could not be stopped till they had dashed on for nearly half a mile. Laura sat pale as death watching her husband's face. He was quiet, very pale, looking straight before him, his hand pressed to his side.

"You may drive home, Thomas," he said, quietly, when the horses had become manageable.

"Laura I wish you would send for Dr. D." he said, when they reached home.

She gave the order with a sinking heart, then sat watching her husband as he walked to and fro with a look of suppressed excitement, never removing his hand from his side. Since he said nothing, indeed seemed scarcely aware of her presence, she could ask no questions.

The doctor came, and she left them alone, going up to her chamber to throw herself upon her knees with voiceless petitions.

It seemed long, but was really only a few minutes before there was a knock at the door, and a message. The doctor would like to see her below for a moment.

She met him just at the foot of the stairs. But what did it mean? His eyes were sparkling, his lips smiling, and he was walking about the hall rubbing his hands in joyful impatience.

"Mrs. Vincent," he said, grasping her hand as she stood on the step above him, "I have joyful news, glorious news for you!"

A dimness swept before her vision, and she looked at him mutely, and with parted lips.

"Your husband will live! By some miracle that terrible ball has made its appearance close to the skin. Its shape can be distinctly felt. It will be a mere nothing to cut it out. Not the slightest danger. I am going for my instruments now, and shall be back in fifteen minutes."

What more he would have said was stopped, for Laura Vincent melted at his feet like a wreath of snow. She awoke in her own chamber, with Betty rubbing her hands, and laughing and crying in a breath.

"Where is Mr. Vincent?" she cried, starting up.

"He's in the dining-room with the doctor, ma'am; and I'm so glad!"

"Well, Betty, go down now, for they may want you, and if he is any worse come directly and tell me."

When she was alone, Laura covered her face and thought. What a change! and how should she meet it? She was this man's wife before the world. They were bound for life; and yet all he had wanted of her was a companion to cheer and amuse him for a few weeks, a sort of fancy servant whose wages would be paid in his will. Would he hate her utterly? Would he try to put her away? and could he do so? She knew little of the law. That he considered her alien now she had proof, for while she had known every bad symptom and every pain from which he had suffered, when he had received the first ray of hope he was silent to her, and she knew of his safety only through the physician. Evidently she would have to go away from him. But over all this confusion of bitter feeling was

the joyful thought that he was saved, that he would live.

Betty came again, saying that the doctor was at the door, and wanted to know if he should see her. She rose hastily to meet him.

"Pale yet," he laughed. "But I have no fears. People don't die of joy. Mr. Vincent is as well as he ever was, and I left him holding a little leaden ball in his hand which I have just taken from his side. Are you curious to see it?"

Laura would gladly have escaped seeing Mr. Vincent for a while, and shrank from intruding on him, but felt that decency required she should go.

He looked up eagerly as she entered, and a deep flush ran over his face as he saw her. She went to him with downcast eyes and pale face, and somewhat formally offered her congratulations.

The doctor stared at them, muttered an excuse, and left.

"I did not mean to deceive you, Laura," he said, gravely. "I thought I was going to die."

"But you are not!" she said, looking up with a flashing smile; then drooping again, "do not speak of anything to-day, please."

"Very well," he assented, coldly.

Visitors came in opportunely, friends who had heard of his good fortune, and among them the careless one whose shot had perilled his life. This man came pale and trembling, almost speechless with a blissful relief.

"I couldn't believe till I saw you," he said, at length. "I didn't dare to think that I had escaped such a blight as your death would have been to me."

Then after dinner Mr. Vincent was out to enjoy his new liberty, and see how it seemed to walk without being afraid to drop at every step. Laura heard him come in early, but did not go down. He did not need her now.

So several days passed, each longing yet dreading to speak to the other about what was most in their thoughts. They met only at the table, and then almost always with company. Mr. Vincent was now a man among men, his strong vitality playing all the more strongly for its temporary restraint. He went out and in his house with a stirring step, the doors banged after him, his clear voice was heard from the street.

The pale girl up stairs watched him through the blind, and listened to him with a sinking heart. She loved this man, and she must leave him! Her resolution was taken. She would no longer stay an unwelcome intruder in the house to which he had invited her. She would go to him and have the matter settled at once. A week had passed since the change in his fate, and it was high time she should rid him of his burden.

She put by the rich dress which he had pressed upon her, and put on again the simple muslin in which she had first come to him. Then she went down stairs and into the parlor where he sat alone. He rose courteously, and placed a chair for her. His eyes dwelt earnestly on her pale face, and his own grew pale, for he felt that the decisive time had come.

"I have been trying to speak to you every day for a week," she began with determined calmness; "but for some reason I could not. It is time our future should be settled. Of course, neither of us need to be reminded of the understanding in which we went through that form of marriage. You are saved, you will live, and for that great blessing we should both be willing to suffer a little inconvenience. I wish you to be free, and you best know what should be done. It seems to me that any jury would pronounce the ceremony null, and that neither of us need be injured by it. Of course, I shall leave here immediately, and after our affairs are settled, I wish to leave the town."

Her voice failed her, and she stopped.

Mr. Vincent was walking the room in uncontrollable agitation.

"I was crazy to think of such a sacrifice!" he exclaimed. "It was the very height of selfishness—a selfishness, too, that has defeated itself. Why did I not die!"

"Because God willed that you should live," said a low mournful voice. He turned to her:

"Laura, can you forgive me for ruining your happiness?" he asked.

"I have nothing to forgive," she said, gently, softly pressing the hand that had clasped hers. "I am glad that I could comfort you when you needed me, and I think there's no great harm done."

"You were a comfort and a blessing to me," he said, presently. "I have a fancy

that I should have died without you. Do you remember I was better as soon as we were married?"

She remembered that evening with a pang of regret. How happy she had been in spite of his danger! His hours seemed few, but they were all to be passed with her; now long years stretched before him, but she must be far away.

He watched her pale tremulous face a moment.

"Laura, do you hate me?" he exclaimed. She steadied her lip and voice.

"No; you have meant me no harm, and cannot do other than you do. I do not wish it otherwise," she added, proudly.

He dropped the hand he held, and began walking again.

"You shall be free immediately if the law will make you so," he said, hurriedly; "and whatever reparation I can make you, I will. I wish," he said, wistfully, pausing before her, "I wish you would forget everything but that I am your friend, and have confidence in me?"

"I have every confidence in you," she said.

He seated himself beside her again and took her hand.

"Laura, have you heard from William Raymond since he came home?"

She looked at him in astonishment.

"William Raymond!"

"Did you not know he had been at home two or three days?"

"I did not. I don't expect to hear from him."

"Do you wish he should know the circumstances under which we were married, and—"

"What can you mean, Mr. Vincent?" exclaimed Laura. "What has Mr. William Raymond to do with it?"

"He loved you once, and may love you yet."

"Possibly," she said, coloring. "But that makes no difference."

"Would you wish him to think that you married another willingly, expecting to spend your life with him?"

"I am quite indifferent what he thinks, Mr. Vincent. It is none of his business," said Laura, with cold surprise.

Eugene Vincent clenched the small hand in his.

"Is he not your lover?"

"I rejected him, sir!"

"Laura, who is he whom you love?" asked her companion, in a passionate undertone.

The crimson blood rushed over her face.

"I have no lover," she said, withdrawing her hand, and rising.

"Dare you tell me that you do not love any one?" he exclaimed, detaining her. "I must know to whom I give you up. "And, Laura, if you love nobody else, by Heaven! I'll make you love me, or I'll die in the attempt."

Mrs. Vincent sank back into her seat again, and looked into her husband's face.

"Eugene!" she said, softly.

"You don't mean, Laura—"

"I—I am afraid I love my husband!" she sobbed, sinking into his arms.

"My own little wife!"

"Laura," he said, after a while. "Do you remember the time you first came into this room and found me asleep?"

"Oh, I've quite forgotten it."

"Well, little girl, you were my darling from that moment. And I have loved you ever since, but was afraid of frightening and disgusting you by saying so. That afternoon we were out riding last, when I felt something move in my side, and putting my hand down felt a bunch there where the rifle-ball was; my first thought was not that I was safe, but that I had ruined your happiness."

"You have made it! You have made it!" she said.

And thus was settled the Vincent marriage, over whose romance all the lads and lasses wondered, over whose splendid prosperity Mrs. Raymond grew bilious and miserable, and of whose entire happiness no one knows so well as the principals themselves.

THE EARL'S DAUGHTER.

BY MISS MARY J. FIELD.

CHAPTER I.

It was the noon of a burning hot day in the month of July. A silence deep and undisturbed seemed to have fallen upon the stately castle of Trenham. No one was visible; all sounds were hushed.

In the deep green woods around could be heard the fall of the grand cascade, the singing of the summer brook, and the faint whisper of the wind among the trees. In the heart of the wood, where the shade was deep and cool, the birds were singing, but where the sun shone brightest and warmest their song was hushed. The bees roamed languidly from flower to flower. Those woods of Trenham were wondrously fair and beautiful. Under the shadow of the tall trees, as far as the eye could reach, wild-flowers raised their heads in thick abundance—the starry primroses, the sweet cowslips, the dainty “white stars,” the bluebells.

In the midst of Trenham woods stands the castle—an old gray stone building of grand and imposing aspect, with noble towers and stately turrets, and large windows looking like huge diamonds in the sunlight—a castle that speaks of ancient grandeur, one of the “stately homes of England,” the cradle of a noble race. Magnificent gardens and pleasure-grounds surround it; on one side is a broad deep lake; in front, a green lawn, at the bottom of which stands a grove of the famous chestnut trees for which Trenham is celebrated. There could be no fairer home, no more picturesque or beautiful spot. Artists come from far and near to sketch its beauties.

The library at Trenham Castle was perhaps the most comfortable room on this hot July day. It was cool and shaded. The long French windows were sheltered from the sun by a rich profusion of roses and eglantine. They opened on to a small green path which led to one of the most beautiful glades in the wood—a glade where the tall trees met overhead, and the golden light that comes softly filtered through them is rich and mellow.

On this morning a couch was drawn to one of the library windows, and on it reclined the Countess of Trenham—a tall fair lady, with a gentle face and wistful eyes. She was not beautiful—she had neither violet eyes nor golden hair, such as poets dream of—but she had a gracious and dignified manner, a calm, clear-cut patrician face; in her eyes lay a shadow such as would fall upon one who knew what it was to live in fear. She sat, on this burning July noon, looking intently down the green glade, watching the shadows that danced upon the grass, and the birds that rejoiced in the warm bright sun.

Lady Trenham was not alone. At the table, writing busily, pausing at times to consult one or other of the papers that lay near him, sat the Earl of Trenham—a noble stately man, seemingly just in the prime of life—a man with a proud face and powerful frame—one who looked every inch of him a soldier and a gentleman.

One thing marred his face, and that was its expression of indomitable pride—pride that would neither break nor bend, that knew no limit or bounds, directed his every thought, word and action. It was not vanity—Lord Trenham was too proud to be vain; nor arrogance—he was ever considerate and kind to his inferiors. Pride of race and of name, pride of high lineage and spotless descent, pride that was the ruling passion of his life, spoke in every feature of his face. Inflexible will was imprinted there—the will of a man who would suffer all, dare all, but never yield. It was a face to admire, perhaps, but not to love; and the lady's eyes fell wistfully upon it.

In that same face there was, too, an expression of habitual restraint and suffering. For all his broad acres and fair lands, his stately castle, his title and rank, Philip, eleventh Earl of Trenham, had never been a happy man, nor led a very happy life.

His sorrow was the same as that which falls to the lot of so many others—want of money. His father—Hubert Trenham—

had been one of the wildest men of the day. He squandered a magnificent fortune, and died, leaving his estate burdened with debts and mortgages heavy and numerous.

When Philip, Lord Trenham, succeeded his father, he succeeded also to a load of care and sorrow. The large rent-roll was absorbed in the payment of interest; the lands were mortgaged; there was no ready money. Most of the splendid old family plate had been sold; there were no horses in the stables; the hounds had long been given up; and, what made matters still worse, there was no credit for the beggared heir of Trenham.

It would be the work of a lifetime to redeem the property and pay off the debts; and to that work Lord Trenham pledged himself. The town house in Grosvenor Square was let, and the young earl settled down at Trenham with his life's task before him. He was then only twenty-one. He dismissed the large and useless retinue of servants, retaining only a few; then, after two years of seclusion and economy, he went to Germany, and there Lord Trenham made what he afterwards considered the greatest and only mistake of his life—he married for love, without thinking of money. For six months he dwelt in the little village of Eichstein, on the Rhine. There he met and loved the tall, fair, gentle lady who became his wife—Hilda von Reichart.

She was the only daughter of the Baroness von Reichart, the widow of a brave German officer. The baroness had no fortune—only a life-interest in some property which at her death reverted to another branch of the family. It was therefore with the greatest delight that she received the proposal of Lord Trenham for her daughter's hand. To her simple and inexperienced mind, the young English earl was a millionaire. Hilda would be a countess—would reign over one of those grand English homes of which she had read and heard.

The chances are many that, if Philip, Lord Trenham, had met Hilda in the brilliant crowd of a London season, he would hardly have noticed her. It is quite another thing to meet a gentle fair-haired girl, with dovelike eyes and sweet lips, in the very region of romance, the very realm of love and fancy.

Before the young English earl had spent many days in her society on the fair banks of the Rhine, he believed himself deeply and passionately in love with her. Her face appeared to him most beautiful as she sat, while the moon shone upon the water, telling him the legend of the Lorelei. He asked her then and there to be his wife; and Hilda, who had seen no one so brave or so handsome, so stately or so chivalrous as the young earl, gladly consented. She loved him deeply and well. Her love never quite died away.

Lord Trenham was too proud to deceive in the least respect the young girl who had promised to share his lot. He told her of his poverty, his forced economy, and quiet retired life. He told her how for many years they must live almost alone, without the state and ceremony befitting their name. She consented willingly; there was a charm to her in the name of Trenham woods; she could be very happy in the grand old castle with the tall trees, having the blooming flowers to admire, and the brave young Englishman to love. The Earl of Trenham married the fair German maiden, and brought her to his English home. She was very happy there, and enjoyed the simple primitive life. Hilda Trenham wanted nothing else while that fair book of nature lay spread open before her.

During the second year of their marriage a beautiful little golden-haired girl came to gladden their hearts, and a year afterwards the young heir of Trenham was born. Lady Trenham was happier then than she had ever been. Little Evelyn was a charming child, giving promise of rare and wonderful beauty in after years, while Albert, or, as he was commonly called, Bertie, was a brave and noble boy.

Lady Trenham was very happy with her children, but after a time a shadow seemed to fall over the love that had once existed between the husband and wife. Lord Trenham never failed or wavered in his resolution. He never varied the quiet economical routine that he had laid down for himself, but after a time he became discontented and unhappy. That was when his children were growing up, and he could not give them the advantages due to their position. Then his heart grew sad and sore within him, and he would say to himself that he had sacrificed the

interests of the family to his own love, and half regret that he had not married for money. As years passed on, and the golden-haired Evelyn grew older and more beautiful, his hopes revived. She might marry well; with the prestige of her name and rank, with the dower of her lovely face, it was most probable she would do so.

From his earliest years Bertie Trenham's ambition was to be a soldier. As a child his chief amusement was mimic warfare; his toys consisted of miniature guns, trumpets and flags. No boy was ever born with a more decided vocation than the young heir of Trenham. His father wisely yielded to it. He would have preferred his son to become a great statesman, one of the leaders of his country, but the boy longed for a military life. Soon after he left college his father purchased a commission for him in "The Queen's Own Rangers," and there was no finer or braver young officer in the army than the Earl of Trenham's son and heir.

One comfort came to Philip, Lord Trenham; his self-denial and self-sacrifice had their reward. He knew that when he died his son would succeed to a free and unencumbered estate. The debts were paid, the mortgages with one exception cleared off. Bertie would be able to restore all the family splendors if he married well, and then Treuham would shine again with all its ancient lustre. On the two children every hope of his life depended; and on this morning, when the July sun shone so bright and warm, there had come to Lord Trenham news that filled his heart and mind with glad delight.

CHAPTER II.

AFTER writing for some time, Lord Trenham turned suddenly to his wife.

"I have news that will surprise and please you, Hilda," he said. "Evelyn is most fortunate. She has never made her *debut*, been presented, or mingled in any way with the great world, yet I have received a proposal for her this morning that would make any girl in England proud."

Lady Trenham looked with some surprise at her husband. For many long, long years she had not seen him so cheerful or animated.

"Tell me about it," she said, gently, and her husband continued:

"You remember, perhaps, that last year Evelyn went to Lady Moreham's—she spent three weeks there. She told us she had met young Clive Hamilton. He was a mere "nobody" in those days, but by the death of two near relatives he has since succeeded to the estates and title of Lord Brooke of Brooklynne. He is now one of the richest men in England. He writes to beg my permission to visit Trenham, hoping to be able to win my daughter's heart and hand. Could anything be more fortunate, Hilda? He offers anything I wish to name in the way of settlements. I shall live to see you enjoy life yet."

"You had better tell Evelyn," said Lady Trenham. "I will find her and send her to you."

Leaving the cool shady library, the lady walked rapidly through the magnificent suite of rooms.

"If it could be," she said—"if this cloud would pass over and the sun of prosperity shine upon us!"

She reached the western wing of the castle, where her daughter had a suite of rooms fitted up for her special use. Opening the door of the morning-room, the scene was so pretty that she paused for some minutes to gaze at it.

The room itself was empty, but the long windows were thrown open. In the garden, seated under the shade of a spreading tree, were two young girls. Both were busy over some light, elegant, useless feminine employment, generally known as "lady's work." Near them sat a gentleman, reading aloud from some book that caused great amusement. The sunshine fell upon the golden hair and lovely face of Evelyn Trenham. Her mother might well gaze fondly upon her—by poet or painter nothing could be imagined more charming or graceful than the young girl. By her side sat her cousin, friend and companion, Katherine Rainsforth, a tall stately brunette.

Katherine Rainsforth—the orphan child of Lord Trenham's only sister—had been adopted by him and brought up as his own. She had shared the studies and pleasures of his daughter. Katherine was some years older than her cousin, but the girls were like sisters.

The gentleman who was reading was

more than handsome. His features were of the purest Grecian type; the eyes large and dark; the black hair had a careless graceful wave; the dark mustache did not quite conceal the firm shapely lips. Lionel Carteris had the rarest and highest type of beauty—that of intellect and expression. The dark luminous eyes were full of thought and feeling. His was a face that, once seen, was never to be forgotten.

Lionel Carteris, who talked and laughed so gayly with Evelyn Trenham, was the earl's secretary and amanuensis. His father—old Squire Carteris—had been one of the earl's college friends. Lionel was at school with Bertie when Squire Carteris died, a ruined man, leaving nothing save a good name. The earl offered his services to Lionel. He wanted some one to help him in the management of his estates, to assist him in his complicated accounts, to take the place that his own son should have occupied. He offered this post to Lionel, who gladly accepted it as a preparatory step to something better. And now he had been for two years at the castle.

No thought ever seemed to cross the mind of Lord or Lady Trenham that it was unwise to allow constant companionship between their daughter and the handsome gifted secretary. They considered her as belonging to another and superior order of beings. He was their paid dependant, their inferior; she the only daughter of their house. So far from fearing or foreseeing danger, they were pleased that she had some one to assist her, direct her studies in art and literature, correct her sketches, and make a third in the glees Lord Trenham liked well to hear. They looked upon the secretary much as they did on the pens and pencils he used; they never thought of him as a being likely to love and be loved.

Lady Trenham stood by the window watching the group in the garden. She looked at them as she would have looked at any other beautiful picture; there was no thought of espial in her mind. Suddenly Lionel read something. She could not hear the words, but she saw her daughter's eyes meet his, and the mother's heart died within her as she read that look. It told of deep, fond, unutterable love; it was a look such as years ago her own face had worn when he who was now her husband first spoke of love to her; nor did she fail to observe the burning flush which crim-

sioned that lovely face when Katherine suddenly cried out that "Lady Trenham was there."

"Do not disturb yourselves," said Lady Trenham, joining the little group; "keep your place, Katherine. I am sorry to interrupt you, but your father, Evelyn, is waiting in the library; he wishes to see you."

Again she saw a rapid anxious look exchanged between Lionel Carteris and her daughter, while Evelyn's face grew pale and frightened.

"Come with me," said Lady Trenham, taking her daughter's hand; "we must not keep the earl waiting."

A look of more than anxiety came over the face of Lionel Carteris as the two ladies left the garden, and something like a moan escaped his lips as he watched them. Lady Trenham's heart was full of a vague terror and anxiety that she could not understand.

"What does papa want me for?" asked Evelyn, as they reached the library.

"He has good news for you," replied her mother—"news that I hope will please you, my darling."

Lord Trenham rose when his wife and child entered the room. He took Evelyn's hand in his own and held it there.

"My little Eve," he said, gently, "I have great news for you."

It was very seldom that the grave and stately Earl of Trenham gave way to anything like emotion, or yielded to any demonstration of affection. His daughter looked at him in utter surprise. She saw the glimmer of tears in eyes that she had never seen so gentle and tender before. She saw the firm grave lips quiver as they smiled.

"I have such news, Evelyn," he said. "I am proud of you—proud of the conquest you have made, of the heart you have won."

If he had looked more attentively at his daughter's face, he would have seen the rich bloom fade away, and a wild horror come into the sweet eyes.

"Lord Brooke, whom you met last year as Clive Hamilton, has written, asking permission to pay his addresses to you. Evelyn, I am a proud man, but even I am satisfied. I did not expect such an offer for you, child."

There came no reply from the white

lips. The earl liked his daughter even better for what he deemed her delicate silence.

"Lord Brooke proposes to pay us a visit this month," he continued. "I shall write and bid him welcome. You are too young to understand all the benefits that will accrue to us from this marriage. Eve, it will lighten my heart of a load that has weighed it down for years. I thank Heaven for all its mercies. Shall I send Lord Brooke any message from you?"

Then for the first time he saw the white frightened face and trembling lips of his daughter.

"What is it, Evelyn?" he asked, gently. "Have I alarmed you—told my news too suddenly? Speak to me—tell me you are pleased and happy."

Lord Trenham hardly knew the voice that came at length from the white lips.

"Papa, dear papa," cried the young girl, "he must not come—it can never be!"

The earl looked at his fair young daughter with surprise. He had no suspicion that her words arose from anything more than the shyness and timidity of a young girl. Lady Trenham listened to her with fear and a vague dread of what might follow.

"Why can it never be?" asked her father, with something like a smile.

"For a reason stronger than death, papa," she replied.

"But," pursued Lord Trenham, "what reason can I give him?"

"I do not love him, papa," she replied.

"My dear child," said the earl, "that is no reason at all in our rank; love, as it is called—fancy would be a better name—must give way to other and higher considerations. You have no dislike to Lord Brooke, I presume?"

"No," she said, faintly; "none."

"Then you will soon learn to love him," returned the earl, triumphantly; "so I shall write and tell him when to come."

But Evelyn laid her hand on his arm.

"Papa," she said, earnestly, "it can never be. A reason strong as death forbids it. Do not ask him—I have no love to give."

"Poor child," spoke Lord Trenham, gently, "I have been too abrupt."

"No," she cried, wildly; "it is not that—believe me it can never be!"

But for all answer the earl led his daughter to the couch by the window.

"Rest there, Evelyn," he said; "I will answer Lord Brooke's letter at once. You will be pleased to see him when he comes."

He was alarmed at the wild burst of weeping. It was no mere girlish timidity—it was the grief of one who had trouble of no light kind upon her.

"I do not understand you, Evelyn," said the earl, gravely. "There must be some reason for your strange behaviour. Go now to your own room—remember how much of your father's happiness and welfare you hold in your hands—remember how much of the dignity and well-being of our house depends upon you—and come to me with a different answer this evening."

His was a grave sad face as his daughter went away weeping quietly.

"What can be the matter?" he asked, turning to Lady Trenham. "Follow the child, Hilda, and see if you can make it out."

He would have been still more alarmed if he could have seen his cherished and beloved daughter wringing her hands and crying aloud in the solitude of her own room.

"Katherine," said Lady Trenham to her *protege*, "I want you to do me a favor. Go to Evelyn's room, and see if you can persuade her to tell you why she objects to Lord Brooke's proposal."

"Has he made one?" asked Katherine, with surprise.

"Yes," replied Lady Trenham—"he has loved Evelyn ever since he saw her last year. You know," she continued, "how much such a marriage would conduce to the happiness of Lord Trenham and the welfare of the family. Reason with her, Katherine—she will perhaps listen to you."

CHAPTER III.

It was some time before Katherine could obtain admission into her cousin's room; when the door was opened at last, she looked almost with fear at the white tear-stained face, and the dark eyes so full of fear and sorrow.

"Evelyn darling," said Katherine, "what is the matter? Let me come and talk to you. I used to comfort you years ago in your childish troubles; let me comfort you now."

But neither kind words nor caresses changed the look of despair on Evelyn's face. Katherine drew the young girl to her, and laid the drooping golden head upon her shoulder, sitting in unbroken silence while the unhappy girl wept as though her grief would utterly break her heart.

"Did you dislike Clive Hamilton so much?" asked Katherine, at last. "I remember when you came home you seemed pleased with all his kind attentions."

"I have never thought of him since," said Evelyn. "It is not that, Katherine. I seem to have been asleep and dreaming, and to have suddenly awokened. O, I cannot bear the reality that I look now for the first time in the face!"

"What is the reality, Evelyn?" inquired her cousin. "Trust me—tell me; I will help you—I will do all I can."

"Katherine," said the poor girl, wringing her hands, "even to myself I am afraid to say what I have done—how can I tell it to you? Have you never suspected my secret?"

"Your secret—no," replied her cousin. "What secret can you have? You are but a child, Eve—a simple loving child."

"Ah, no," cried the young girl, shrinking from the kind caressing hand; "I am not a child now. Woman's lot has fallen upon me. I have learned to love and suffer. Help me to tell you what I have done; I am half mad with despair when I think of it. And yet I cannot be sorry—I love him so."

"Love him," repeated Katherine; "love whom?"

"Can you not guess?" said Evelyn. "How could I meet him, listen to him, look in his face, know that he cared for me, and yet not love him?"

"Are you speaking of Lionel Carteris?" asked Katherine, gravely. "Evelyn, surely you have not learned to love him?"

The crimsoned face told its own tale; there was no need for words.

"You must be brave, Evelyn," said her cousin. "You must do hard battle with your love. Remember all the sorrow your father has had; and, believe me, this would be to him the greatest sorrow of all. Lionel is good and true, gifted and noble; but for you to dream of loving him would be a deathblow to all the hopes founded upon you."

"He is more clever than Lord Brooke, or any one else," murmured Evelyn.

"That may be," said her cousin; "but it has nothing to do with the question. If he were Apollo and Adonis combined, he would be no fitting husband for you. Remember he has no money, and you have always lived in luxury."

"I hate luxury!" exclaimed the girl, wildly.

"We must think of other things higher and more noble than our own likes and dislikes," said Katherine, earnestly. "Your love for Lionel would cause so much unhappiness that it could never bring any blessing. Tell me one thing, Eve—does he know it—does he love you?"

"Katherine, you torture me," she cried; "my terrible secret is burning my heart away. I must have been mad. Let me tell you while I have strength to speak. I was married to Lionel Carteris three months ago."

Her strength failed her as she uttered the words. Katherine took her in her arms as she would have done a child, and laid her down upon the pretty white bed. She bent over the white face and tried to bring back its color. There was silence for some minutes; it was Katherine who spoke first.

"You are but a child, Evelyn," she said; "and Lionel Carteris, who has blighted your whole life, is an unprincipled and unworthy man."

"Do not speak harshly of him," entreated Evelyn; "he is my husband."

"He has betrayed the most sacred of all trusts," pursued Katherine. "Your father's roof sheltered him, and he has taken advantage of the kindness to steal his child from him."

"It was all my fault," sobbed Evelyn, pitifully.

"Tell me how it happened, and then I can judge better what to do."

"I have loved him," confessed the young girl, "ever since he came here—Katherine, he is so different from every one else. Papa is always grave and sorrowful, mamma always gentle and sad, but Lionel was young like myself and light-hearted. He made me very happy. He was so kind and gentle. He was the only one who seemed to understand that I, being young, liked to laugh and be happy. He brought sunshine with him. He

changed my whole life, and I learned to love him dearly."

"I do not blame you, Eve," said her cousin. "You were but a child. Lionel should have gone away when he found he loved you."

"He did mean to do so," explained the poor young wife. "But one day—I cannot tell how it happened—we were waiting for mamma in the Lime Walk, and he told me he meant to go away that very evening; but when he knew I loved him, he stayed on—I could not let him go."

"But why did you not tell Lord or Lady Trenham?" asked Katherine. "Why resort to concealment and deceit?"

"I know it was all wrong," said the girl—"bitterly, cruelly wrong. We meant to tell them. And Lionel was always talking about what he would do out in the great world—how he would leave Trenham, and work hard until his name should be famous, and riches should pour in upon him; and then he would come back, crowned with honors, and ask for me. We had arranged all that; but he wanted to be quite sure of me first; and so, Katherine—do not turn from me—we were married three months ago. It is only now that I seem to understand what I have done. Lionel arranged it all; and on the day you went with mamma to Fernleigh, and papa was shut up with his lawyer, I went to Eastham, and was married there—married in my own name, Evelyn Trenham, at the little old church outside the town. What shall I do? I cannot look in my father's face again. I must have been mad. I never thought of anything except that Lionel should be quite sure of me."

"There is no help for it now," said Katherine. "A greater piece of folly could not be imagined—you, the Earl of Trenham's daughter, privately married to his secretary! Where were your sense and conscience, Evelyn?"

"They were sleeping," she replied. "Katherine, do not be angry with me. I have sinned, and something tells me I shall have to suffer. I should have gone on dreaming for years if my father's words this morning had not aroused me. Will there be any pity for me? I am so young—not twenty yet; and I did not think—I never realized what I was doing. Yet I do love him, and cannot wish it undone."

"The truth must be told at once," said

Katherine, decisively, "before your father answers Lord Brooke's letter—he must know all, and, Evelyn, if you are wise, you will tell him yourself."

"It would kill me!" she cried.

"Nay, you must be brave. You have done a cruel grievous wrong; repair it bravely, and bear its consequences patiently. It is the only way in which you can atone for it."

But there was not much bravery in the white frightened face.

"Lionel ought to tell Lord Trenham himself," said Katherine, "but I fear for the consequences. It may soften the blow if it comes from your hands."

But she who had sinned so thoughtlessly, so lightly, who had forgotten the sacred reverence due to parents, and the respect due to herself, was frightened. She did not dare to look at Lord Trenham and tell him what she had done.

"It must be so," continued Katherine, smoothing the shower of rippling golden hair that fell like a veil over the beautiful sorrowful face. "I shall fetch Lady Trenham now, and she will take you to the earl."

Katherine Rainsforth looked sad and sorrowful as she sought the gentle mistress of Trenham. She knew the blow about to fall would bring the keenest and sharpest sorrow. She half realized what it was to be deceived by the dearest and best beloved—to meet with ingratitude from one loaded with favors and kindness.

"How sad you look, Katherine!" said Lady Treuham, as her niece entered her room.

"I am come from a sad scene, aunt," she replied; "and I want you to go with me to hear what I feel to be a sad story."

They went together to Evelyn's room. She still lay upon the pretty white bed, her golden hair falling like a silken veil over the pillow.

"Mamma," she cried, as Lady Trenham entered the room—"mamma, do not hate me—I cannot marry Lord Brooke, for I am Lionel's wife!"

CHAPTER IV.

A THUNDERBOLT falling at the feet of the gentle mistress of Trenham would not have shocked and startled her as did her

daughter's words. Her fair sad face flushed, and keen indignation lighted her eyes.

"Married," she reflected, vaguely, and with a bewildered expression—"married to Lionel—can it be true, Evelyn? What have I done to be so cruelly punished?"

The unhappy girl rose and tried to clasp her mother's hands. Lady Trenham recoiled from her.

"Do not touch me, Evelyn," she said, coldly. "Tell me if it is true that you, my daughter, have so grossly deceived me."

"It is true, but the fault is all mine, mamma—I loved Lionel."

"You did not woo Mr. Carteris, or ask him to run away, I presume," said the countess. "I do not understand it. Evelyn, in my country love and marriage are sacred things; but we consider love and reverence to our parents even more sacred. I am startled, shocked and grieved. Good sense and good taste revolt from such conduct."

"Mamma," pleaded the young girl, "forgive me. I see my sin. I see the wrong I have done; intercede for me with papa. I am afraid of him."

"You are unworthy of him," said the lady. "Your father would suffer a thousand deaths rather than deceive those who trust him."

The gentle stately lady could not understand it. Her youth had been passed without incident. Her calm passionless rest had never been disturbed, save by her love for the young English earl. She could not understand the impetuous nature that prompted such wild rebellion as her daughter had been guilty of. It was a new phase of life to the fair German lady.

"Mamma," sobbed the penitent girl, "say you forgive me; and do not blame Lionel."

"Mr. Carteris has forfeited all claim to esteem," said Lady Trenham; "and you, Evelyn, have blighted not only your own life but ours. What will your brother say when he hears that his sister, whom he considered a fitting wife for the brightest and noblest in the land, has clandestinely married her father's secretary? Take all the silly romance from it, and say if you, Evelyn Trenham, are not ashamed of such a deed."

At that moment the earl's voice was heard at the room door.

"Hilda," he cried, "I have been looking for you. I want Evelyn."

Lady Trenham opened the room door, and her husband gazed in bewildered surprise at the scene. Evelyn crouched rather than knelt at her mother's feet; Lady Trenham's face was pale and agitated as he had never seen it before; Katherine Rainsforth was weeping bitterly.

"What is the matter?" cried the earl. "What has happened?"

None of the three who gazed in speechless terror at his wondering face seemed able to reply. At last Lady Trenham, leaving her daughter, went up to him and laid her hand lovingly on his arm.

"Philip," she said, "your life has had many cares and troubles—the heaviest blow has yet to fall. Let me help you to bear it."

"What is it?" demanded the earl, sternly. "Do not keep me in suspense."

"Be pitiful," said Lady Trenham, her mother's heart relenting at the sight of her child's face—"be pitiful, Philip—she is very young. Evelyn has been married to Lionel Carteris for three months."

Even she, his wife, quailed before the look of livid rage that overspread his stern face. He turned to the kneeling girl and rudely grasped her arm.

"Is it true?" he hissed from between his white lips. "Have you dared to trick me? Is it true? Look at me—answer for your deed. Are you the wife of the penniless ingrate whom I have fed and sheltered?"

"I am," said Evelyn, faintly. She had ceased weeping, and still knelt, with a dread beyond words upon her face.

With a voice of thunder the earl uttered words so cruel that his wife shrank from him, while his daughter clasped her hands and cried for mercy.

"Not one word," he said. "Never let me hear the sound of your voice again. Katherine, go and tell Carteris I wish to see him here."

Not one word was exchanged between parents and child. Lady Trenham tried to plead, but her husband impatiently bade her cease. In less than five minutes Lionel Carteris stood before him. The anger of the earl was terrible to behold as his eyes fell upon the young secretary.

"Do not waste words, sir," he said; "tell me if it is true that you have dared

to persuade my daughter to contract a private marriage with you—that you have had the audacity to steal my child from me—that you whom I trusted have violated that trust as no gentleman would?"

"I loved your daughter," replied the young man. "I did wrong to speak of my love. I did a greater wrong to persuade her to marry me—a wrong I repented of as soon as done. Let the punishment fall upon me. I am strong; she is young and fragile."

"Therefore you might have spared her," interrupted Lord Trenham. "Favor me with the particulars of this most dishonorable affair; let me know if my daughter is really married or not."

Briefly enough the young man gave him the particulars he desired. Then for some minutes there was profound silence.

"Evelyn," said her father, "I do not curse you—I would rather have seen you dead than as you now are—but from this moment you cease to be a child of mine—you will be to me as one dead. Within an hour you leave the home you have disgraced; and never while I live will I consent to see you again. You have chosen your lot; words are all vain. You are unworthy of your name and of your race—unworthy to be under the same roof that shelters your noble mother. Go, and in life never let me see you again. I forbid your mother and cousin to exchange another word with you. From this moment you belong to the man you have chosen."

He never looked at the crouching figure or the white face; he was deaf to the sharp cry of agony that came from his daughter's lips; he was deaf to her mother's cry for pardon—blind and deaf to all. Hot anger filled his heart and surged in his brain.

* * * * *

Before the July sun had set in the heavens Lionel Carteris and his wife had left the castle. Evelyn clung weeping round her mother's neck. She pleaded and prayed, but she pleaded in vain; the earl refused to listen to her. He forbade her name to be uttered in his presence, and refused to leave his room until the carriage containing the unhappy pair had been driven from the door. His anger knew no bounds or limits.

"If the man had one single thing to recommend him," he said to his wife, "I could have borne it better. He has led a

useless purposeless life; he has never done a brave or noble action."

There was some little commotion in the neighborhood when it became known that Lady Evelyn had married Mr. Carteris and was banished from her father's roof. But the earl had few visitors, and fewer friends; the scandal was a nine days' wonder that soon passed away.

Lord Trenham gave orders that all his daughter's clothes and jewels should be given to her—that nothing belonging to her should be left at the castle—that every trace of her should be destroyed. She had been much loved by the servants and dependents, and many tears were shed as the beautiful sad face passed from sight. Yet the domestics, who were proud of their long service, were surprised and indignant in their own way, feeling that their beautiful young mistress had cast a heavy shadow on the family name and glory.

If Lord Trenham suffered, he never let it be known. From that July day his daughter's name was never mentioned. Lady Trenham's face grew paler and more wistful every day. She pined for the beloved daughter, who was dearer to her than all the world beside. She grieved, too, for her sis—grieved that one she had loved and cherished could have so far forgotten all that was due to her. Katherine Rainsforth did her best to supply the exiled daughter's place. Many long hours the two ladies spent in forming plans for a reconciliation. They each remembered, now that it was too late, that many things might have shown them how matters stood had they not been almost willfully blind.

The bright hot summer passed, autumn came and went, winter's snow lay deep upon the ground, and there came no news of the once-loved daughter of the house. The portrait of the beautiful golden-haired girl, which Lord Trenham had once so proudly shown, was taken away; of Evelyn, his only daughter, there remained to him nothing but a most bitter memory.

CHAPTER V.

"THE worst that can be said of us, Evelyn," said Lionel, as they looked their last upon the woods that surrounded the castle, "is that we began at the wrong end. I should have worked for you first, and then have won you. I am half sorry we

were so thoughtless, but I cannot help rejoicing that you are my own."

And the poor young wife, blinded by her deep love, forgot the sorrow she had left behind her, and was happy in the golden dream of her first love. The world was all before them. Youth, ever sanguine, and love, ever bright, hid from them the prosaic reality.

"I shall make a great name for myself, Eve," said the young husband, "and then your father will relent and forgive us."

They went to London. Lionel held solemn counsel with himself as to the method in which he should acquire fame. He decided that the most speedy way to the top of the ladder would be to write a book—a political novel. That would bring him into public notice. He would make politics his study, get into Parliament, astonish all England by his eloquence, and then the rest would be easy. Never once did he doubt that his dreams would be realized; no fear of failure ever crossed his mind.

They both agreed that it would be better for Lady Evelyn to drop her title—it would seem absurd for a Lady Carteris to be living in second-rate apartments in Kentish Town.

The first two months passed happily enough. All was novelty to the young wife. She would have been perfectly happy but for the remembrance of what she knew to be her sin. Lionel had fifty pounds when he left Trenham. It was almost all expended before he fairly looked his position in the face, and remembered that when that sum was exhausted he knew not where to look for more. The famous book would bring them in money—who could tell how much? But, although he worked hard at it, weeks, if not months, must elapse before it could be finished.

The time came when the fifty pounds had all disappeared, and there was not a shilling for the week's food and rent. Lionel had to pause in the midst of his book and seek for employment. He then found himself reduced to the common level—only one amongst many hundred gentlemen, highbred and well-educated like himself, and all like him desirous of finding employmenct. Gradually and slowly he began to see himself as he was—clever, gifted and intellectual, but untrained and unfit to battle with the world, unfit to grasp the stern realities of life, so different from his dreams and hopes.

One by one the jewels that his wife had brought from her home were sold, and they lived upon the proceeds; when they were gone, hunger and want stared them in the face. The young husband searched the great city, and could obtain nothing to do. Fortune seemed against him. He could not secure a single engagement. The number of advertisements he answered, the number of applications he made, the repulses, the denials, the humiliations he met with, would have wearied a far more courageous man. He fought his fight nobly and well, but the odds were against him, and he lost.

The pressure of poverty was hard and bitter to bear. Evelyn appealed to her father, telling him of their privations and sufferings; but her letter was returned without a word of comment.

Three weeks afterwards, driven almost to desperation by poverty and want, she wrote to Lady Trenham; her letter met with the same fate.

Husband and wife said but little in those days. Once Lionel drew Evelyn to him, and pillow'd her head upon his breast.

"Do you repent having married me, darling?" he asked. "My love has cost you very dear."

"It has crowned my life," she responded, "and has changed me from a gay careless child to a thoughtful woman. Lionel, I would sooner be poor with you than rich with a king."

And Lionel Carteris thanked Heaven in his heart that poverty and want had not brushed the bloom from his wife's love and devotion.

But the poverty they had borne without complaining was unendurable when another life depended on theirs. When Evelyn's baby was born, she was very ill—so ill and weak that the doctor declared she could not recover without change of food and generous diet. She needed good wine and good food; if she did not have both, no art or skill could save her.

From the unhappy young husband Doctor Graham heard the story of the fatal and imprudent marriage. As far as lay in his power he helped the little family, but his own needs were great and his own cares heavy. He resolved to do a kind and brave deed—to go at once to Trenham, see the earl himself, and plead for the young wife whose life hung upon a thread.

Lionel Carteris was in despair; his book proved to be a complete failure—no one would undertake it. His fair young wife, the petted and beloved daughter of a noble line, lay literally dying for want of those luxuries he could not procure. He was without money, without employment; nothing was left of the jewels and trinkets that had been his wife's. His heart sank, his strength left him, hope and ambition were dead. The girl he had stolen from her luxurious home lay dying, and he could not avert her doom.

The result of Doctor Graham's interference was a letter written by Lady Trenham to her daughter. The earl offered to take her back, to pardon her, to provide for herself and her child, if she would consent to abandon her husband—he would never forgive. She might return home and live with them if she would promise not to see him again.

It was Lionel himself who read this letter to his young wife. His face grew deadly pale as he did so. They were both silent for some minutes, and then he bent over his wife and whispered:

"It would save your life, darling—will you go?"

"No," she replied; "let me die here with you, Lionel. I am quite content."

He saw a still deeper pallor spread over the white wan face, and in that moment Lionel Carteris almost cursed his own reckless deed.

Despair took hold of him. He said to himself again and again that he had destroyed the young life, once gay and smiling as the life of a summer flower. The room where his wife lay seemed stifling. He had not tasted food that day; he resolved to make one more effort to obtain work.

In after years Lionel never remembered how he left home. He had a faint recollection of wandering, faint and ill, by the river side, of sitting down to rest, and of talking to some rough man, evidently a wanderer like himself. He remembered that his pocket-book was stolen, and that he smiled at the disappointment of the thief, who would find nothing but papers therein. Then a feeling of unconsciousness came over him; a dull red mist came before him—a noise as of gurgling waters sounded in his ears.

When sense and memory returned, he was lying in the ward of a London hospital.

In answer to his questions, the nurse told him that he had been there two days, and that it was now the evening of the third. He waited until morning—when he would be permitted to depart—in a fever of suspense.

Thankful once more to find himself in the open air, anxious to hurry home, and dreading the effect that his absence might have had upon his wife, Lionel walked quickly through the park. He seated himself upon one of the iron benches to rest. Lying there he saw a newspaper, evidently left by some one who had finished reading it. He took it up carelessly and glanced over its contents. No wonder that his face grew white, and his hands trembled; no wonder that a wild terrible look came into his eyes. In one corner was a little paragraph telling how, three days before, the body of a man had been found in the river near Blackwell—the body of a man supposed to have been accidentally drowned, for there were no marks of violence upon him. He was shabbily dressed, and had nothing about him of any value. A pocket-book was found in his coat, by which it was discovered that the unfortunate man's name was Lionel Carteris, and his address, No. 3 Clayton Road, Kentish Town.

With wild eyes and beating heart Lionel read the account of his own death. He saw in a moment how the mistake had arisen. The man with whom he had spoken at the river side had stolen his pocket-book, and had afterwards fallen into the river—accidentally, no doubt.

"If Evelyn has seen this," he cried, "it will kill her."

It seemed to him an age before he reached Clayton Road. He stopped abruptly, for there before his door stood a travelling carriage which he knew to be the Earl of Trenham's. Even as he stood he saw Lord Trenham himself, half leading half carrying Evelyn to the carriage. He noticed his wife's deep mourning, and the nurse with the little child dressed in black. He saw the earl seat himself by his daughter's side, and then he knew that his wife, believing him to be dead, was going home. He caught one glimpse of her white sad face, and his heart died within him. Why should he care to live when she believed him dead?

Would it not be better, he said to himself, if he were dead? Evelyn's life would be saved—she would know no more want

or privation. His boy would be an earl's grandson, not the half-starved child of a pauper—ah, a thousand times over it would be better if he were dead!

Why not die to them? He might live out the remnant of his days and yet be dead to wife and child. Let Evelyn, let the whole world believe that the dead man found in the river was Lionel Carteris. Let Lionel Carteris die to the world, to love, to happiness, to fame; let him thus expiate the reckless folly of his youth.

He went to the place where the drowned man's body lay; he heard the care-taker say that he must have been a poor relation of Lord Trenham's, for Lord Trenham's solicitor had given orders for a funeral at his lordship's expense, and in the cemetery at Finchley a plain stone was to be erected to the memory of Lionel Carteris, aged twenty-two. There was no one to lament over him—his young wife was breaking her heart far away in the stately castle at Trenham. Lionel's resolve was taken; henceforth he would be dead in life.

He went back to the park, and sat down stunned and dizzy. He had no money and no food. Presently a recruiting-sergeant, noting the fine manly figure and broad shoulders, came up, and began a glowing panegyric on military life. He was startled by the haggard young face that looked dispairingly into his own.

"I am quite willing to enlist," said Lionel Carteris. "I am tired of life. If, as you say, your regiment is soon going to India, I will join it. Give me the shilling."

And before sunset that day Lionel Carteris was one of her majesty's soldiers, and had taken his place in the train for Weymouth, where his regiment was stationed. He was too indifferent to ask its name. A half fear seized him when he found that he was one of "The Queen's Own Rangers," of which regiment Captain Bertie Trenham was in command.

CHAPTER VI.

ONE year had passed. The young widow in the castle of Trenham still mourned for the husband she had loved so dearly. Her little child had learned to say his father's name. Lady Trenham was kinder and more indulgent than ever to her daughter, whose fair sad face was so wistful and pale.

The earl had so far relented from his

severity as to speak kindly of the man who had been her husband. He said that "poor Lionel" had great talents, a keen intellect, and rare wit, and that, had fortune favored him, he might have made his way in the world.

But as this, the old sorrow, began slowly to die away, a new one arose. The strange sad mutiny in India had broken out, and "The Queen's Own Rangers" were ordered thither at once.

No greater blow could have fallen upon Lord Trenham. His idolized son and heir, for whom he had saved and deprived himself of everything save the most needful things of this life—this son, upon whom the fortune of his house depended—was going to certain danger, if not to certain death.

Nothing could avert the blow. As an English gentleman and a man of honor, the young captain could not exchange or sell out when there was danger in view; yet, if he should meet his death, the long and noble line of the Trenhams would end, the estates pass to another family, and the title become extinct. Moreover, for this son, for the future of his race, had Lord Trenham endured a life of privation.

The young heir of Trenham had felt nothing but pity for his sister. He forgave her imprudent marriage; he said she had suffered enough when she told him how dearly she had loved Lionel in life, and how in death she loved his memory. He caressed her tenderly, and said she should not be teased about a second marriage, but should live with him.

The earl and his wife bade a sorrowful adieu to the brave and noble young officer, who longed to avenge the murderous wrongs inflicted on his countrymen. They saw him depart with heavy forebodings and anxious heart.

For many months they heard regularly from their son. He distinguished himself greatly in various actions with the mutineers, and the name of Trenham became a household word in England. At last a letter came that changed the course of many lives.

"You may kneel, dear ones, and thank Heaven for me that I still live," wrote Bertie. "The dying and the dead lie around me; yet I am saved—saved by the brave and daring heroism of a man who is as noble as he is courageous. But for him I should have been lying here, with the sun-

beams falling upon my dead face; but for him the hand penning these lines would have been cold and still—the heart so full of gratitude to Heaven and to him, so full of love to you, would have ceased to beat. Under God I owe him my life. Let me tell you my story.

"On the eighteenth was fought a battle, of which you will all hear at home. Our regiment was ordered into action, and we had to pursue the enemy. The military details of my story will not interest you; they will be painted by a far more able hand.

"In the heat of the pursuit I rode somewhat ahead of my troop. Suddenly I found myself surrounded by Sepoys—death in their flaming eyes and dark faces. It seems to me now like a terrible ghostly dream.

"I fought my way with the desperation of a doomed man. Fear of my enemies were disarmed and wounded; the fifth, by a sudden blow, forced my sword from my hand. I gave myself up for lost. He struck at me with a long sharp dagger; but it fell upon another breast. 'My life for his!' I heard some one say. A man in hot haste had flung himself before me, and received the blow intended for me. I hardly knew that I was saved until I felt his warm blood flow over me; and my men, crowding round, raised him from the ground.

"I was wounded, sick and giddy, yet not so ill as to forget his words. 'My life for his.' Who was he? What had I done that he should give his life for mine?

"'Take care of that man,' I said to Captain Reeve—'he has saved my life at the risk of his own.'

"'He is dead,' said one of his comrades. But no—life still lingered, despite the horrible gaping wound.

"I remember no more for some days. When memory and sense both returned, my first thought was of the man who had offered his life for mine. He still lived, but his life hung upon a thread. I asked many questions about him. They told me his name was William Lawson, and that he enlisted more than a year ago. There was evidently some mystery about him, for he had the manners, the education, the refinement of a highbred gentleman. He spoke but little, and was fearlessly brave—brave even to recklessness—seeming to court rather than avoid death.

"One day, when I was able for the first

time to walk and resume some of my old habits, Doctor Montrose came up to me. He told me that the man I had inquired so much about was dying, and that if I wished to thank him for saving my life I must see him that evening. It was growing dusk then, and I followed the surgeon. The poor fellow lay quite still upon his bed. I bent over him and whispered my thanks. I am no coward, but tears ran down my face as I saw the parched lips, noted the short quick breath, and knew that my life was purchased by his.

"'Do not thank me,' he said, faintly; 'I owe a life to the Trenhams. I only give back what I once stole.'

"I thought he was delirious, yet there was something familiar in the tone of his voice. I bent still lower, and, as sure as I live to write the words, it was Lionel Carteris, my sister's husband. I called out his name in utter bewilderment, and a crimson flush covered his face.

"'I did not think that you would know me,' he said. 'Months ago when danger surrounded us, I began to watch for an opportunity. I always meant to give you my life, in return for the blight and sorrow I had brought upon your sister.'

"In a faint low voice he told me the story of the mistake that led to the belief in his death."

This story the heir of Trenham told in simple words, just as he had heard it from the white lips of Lionel Carteris.

"It was the simplest and saddest recital I ever heard," continued Bertie. "Round his neck the poor fellow wore a locket containing Evelyn's portrait, and one golden tress of her hair. He asked me to lay it on his heart when he should be dead, and let it be buried with him. Hot tears streamed forth from his eyes when he spoke to me of his child, he said that in his dreams he saw him and heard him speak. But he did not die. Though feeble and delicate, Lionel Carteris still lives, and we are coming home together."

The letter concluded with messages to all the loved ones at home, and said that before the end of May the writer hoped once more to see them.

There was enclosed from the heir of Trenham to his father a passionate appeal for pardon for Lionel.

"Will you grant it?" asked his wife, anxiously.

"Yes," said the earl, in a tone of deep emotion; "I forgive him. He has won for himself a truer nobility than the mere accident of birth or title could have given him. He has sinned, but he has done a noble deed—such as only brave and noble men can do—therefore I pardon him, and will take him home as I would my own son."

No words can tell the delight of the fair young wife, or the glee of the little prattling child. Weeks and days were anxiously counted; at last came the day which was to bring the travellers home. It was a beautiful evening towards the end of May when they arrived, and the golden sun shone upon no scene more beautiful than that of the fair loving wife weeping, half with pain, half with happiness, over the changed face of her husband.

* * * * *

Fortune has smiled upon the Trenhams. Bertie has married a great heiress, and her wealth brought ease and competence. There are no more privations; the castle of Trenham is celebrated throughout the country for its unbounded hospitality.

Lionel Carteris has almost reached the top of the ladder. Fame and wealth have done their best for him. Lady Evelyn Carteris is one of the most beautiful and popular women in London, and no one is so proud as she of her husband's fame.

Katherine Rainsforth never married. A beautiful painting of hers hangs in the gallery of the castle; it represents the incident of the mutiny described by Bertie Trenham—Lionel Carteris shielding Bertie Trenham from the thrust of a Sepoy's dagger. The earl calls Katherine a "Radical," for the picture bears the simple title of "True Nobility."

THE GHOST OF HENDEE HALL.: CHAPTER XI. CHAPTER XII. CHAPTER XIII.

Pierce, Etta W

Ballou's Monthly Magazine (1866-1893); Jan 1874; 39, 1; American Periodicals

pg. 15

THE GHOST OF HENDEE HALL.

BY ETTA W. PIERCE.

[CONCLUDED.]

CHAPTER XL

"MISS LERMOND," said the housekeeper, putting her head through the half-open door, "there's a woman below, whom Barbara has let in unawares, asking to see you."

The room was full of warm spring sunshine. It was on its soft carpet, and French furniture, and damask draperies. Outside a bluebird sang in a budding maple tree. Inside came a continual sound of voices and busy clatter from Miss Lermond's dressing-room. Miss Lermond herself, half buried in an easy-chair, sat leaning listlessly back, listening to that bluebird, with her hands crossed on her lap, and the dark lashes just touching her pale cheeks. On the white counterpane of the bed lay something whiter still, from which she kept her eyes turned steadily away—a dress of white satin and point lace, flung down there like a snow-wreath, a pair of dainty satin slippers, and a bridal veil. The toilet table was covered with bridal gifts, one—a small exquisite casket of carved wood, stood open, and coiled upon its velvet cushion lay, in the glittering sunlight, a magnificent set of Indian opals—St. Maur's gift. To-morrow Nathalie would be a bride.

At the sound of Mrs. Roberts's voice in the doorway she started, but did not turn.

"Who is it?" asked the listless voice.

"She says her name is Alsie McKensie, and that she's come from Coltonsleigh. I told her to go away and not disturb you—that you were making ready for the wedding in the morning."

"And has she gone?" quickly.

"Not she," said Roberts; "she's got Scotch blood in her veins—stubborn as a mule—they all are. She's waiting still."

Coltonsleigh—McKensie; surely Nathalie had heard those names before. What could the woman want of her? Some latent curiosity, born of one of those mysterious instincts which come to us all some-

time in our lives, prompted her to rise and follow Roberts down.

Alsie McKensie, as it happened, was holding at that moment a smart altercation at the foot of the stairs with the little French maid Marie, one jabbering in broad Scotch, the other in detestable English, and neither understanding a word beyond their own in the matter. The woman was tall and approaching middle age, with a strong heavy face, and a display of tawdry finery in her dress, that Marie was noticing with Parisian eyes. She made a deep courtesy as Nathalie appeared, then looked at her closely from head to foot.

"God's mercy!" she muttered; "she's as fair-favored as the ither! I am Alsie McKensie from Coltonsleigh, and I ha' e'en cam to speak wi' the leddy o' the Hall—she that's to be a bride to-morrow."

Nathalie motioned the woman to follow her beyond the prying eyes of Marie.

"And now," she said, quietly, "what business have you with me, Alsie?"

Alsie twisted the fringe of her shawl nervously round her broad hand.

"I bided a spell at the cot wi' the ould mither, and then I walked on here. There's been something sair upon my mind these mony days. Is it true that ye go to kirk to-morrow wi' the master o' the Fields?"

"I shall be married to-morrow," assented Nathalie, dimly wondering who this woman could be.

"Ye ha' heard, perhaps, how I was at the Hall in the first leddy's time?" Alsie went on. Nathalie nodded.

"Aweel, I kenned St. Maur then, and I ken him now, and I waun say to ye, were they my last words, that it is e'en better for ye to go to kirk in a shroud than wi' St. Maur for your bridegroom."

A flush of latent anger crimsoned Nathalie's cheek. She looked haughtily into the woman's strong and earnest face.

"Have you come from Coltonsleigh," she demanded, "to tell me this?"

[Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1865, by THOMAS & TALBOT, Boston, Mass., in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington.]

"I have, my leddy."

"And does St. Maur know of your coming?"

"God forbid!" answered Alsie, looking around with a start of alarm.

"Then," said Nathalie, "let me understand you. Why should I not wed him? If you have aught to say to me, say it quickly."

"Ah," answered Alsie, shaking her head, "I canna say more. Ye maur take warning by this—I canna break an oath!"

"Is the woman dazed?" thought Nathalie.

"But," Alsie went on, with strange vehemence, "I can swear to ye that I speak truly. He is a braw callant, but a false-hearted one, and no fit mate for such as ye. I will e'en kneel and swear it, an' ye will hear."

"No?" cried Nathalie.

"Ah, ye dinna believe me!" cried Alsie, searching her face. "Lo'e is e'er blind. Aweel, will ye ken *this* and believe it, I wonder, in place o' an old woman's words?"

She flashed out something suddenly from beneath the folds of her shawl, and dropped it into Nathalie's passive hand. It was a letter sealed and directed, with not crossed, no i dotted.

O, the fierce momentary struggle for calmness under Alsie's keen eyes! She took the letter, white to the very lips.

"Who gave you this?" she cried.

Alsie's face was as expressionless as stone.

"A gentleman that rowed over from the lighthouse yestereen, fine and weil-favored. He asked for Alsie McKenzie, and bade me gi' ye this if I cam to Hendee this day."

A thousand thoughts were coursing like lightning through Nathalie's brain. She turned the letter over in her hand, her face growing hard and bitter. All thoughts of St. Maur—of everything but pride and wrong, were banished. How dared he—how dared he, the perfidious, the false-hearted—perhaps the husband of another—write to her?

"I am to take the answer back to Coltonsleigh, and he will come for it to-night," said Alsie.

There was a fire burning in a grate at the further end of the room. Nathalie rose from her seat, and walked slowly towards it.

"His name?" she said.

"I dinna ken," answered Alsie, grim as an ogress.

Nathalie paused on the hearth with stormy dark eyes.

"Here is your answer," she said, dropping the letter, with its seal unbroken, upon the glowing coals; "take it back with you to Coltonsleigh!"

"And is that all?" asked Alsie.

"All!"

"Then I maur be gone."

She drew her shawl around her with an unchanging face. Nathalie followed her to the door, leaving a handful of gray ashes among the sea-coal.

"I wauld wish ye joy o' the morrow," said Alsie, looking at her wistfully, "if I did na ken it wauld be turned to sorrow. It was woe enow for the first leddy o' the Hall, but it will be greater woe still for ye."

With the words of the woman ringing in her ear, Nathalie fled back to her own chamber. She was bewildered—sick.

Turn back? It was too late. She stood face to face with her doom now, helpless, and with some such vain despair at her heart as some hunted wild creature might feel circled closer and closer round by the toils of the hunter. Flinging herself prostrate upon the bed, beside the fleecy bridal draperies, Nathalie wept such tears as no heart ever weeps but once. All that makes life worth the having she had lost forever.

St. Maur called at twilight, but no Nathalie appeared. It was well that he could accommodate himself so readily to the whims of his betrothed, for their name was legion. A bunch of rare queenly camellias, from the conservatory of the fields, with a cross of blood-red Indian rubies dropped into their waxen hearts, he left behind him—the last of many princely gifts. Marie, going with it in search of her mistress, found her wandering about, like a ghost, in the gathering twilight of the gallery.

The sun had set low down behind the budding beech-wood. A few stars were out already in the sky, and the dull thunder of the sea boomed drearily up the shore. Marie lifted a lamp in the niche at the head of the staircase, and departed noiselessly.

And Nathalie? She had thrown herself into a seat at the window, and sat there looking out into those same beech-woods.

The wind just stirred the deep purple of the satin curtains around her, and the one straight path of lamplight from the niche was clearing the black shadows of the place in a long track of tremulous gold. Through half-open doors, along the dim length of the gallery, half-obscured visions of the wedding paraphernalia—promises of what the morrow was to bring forth, still confronted her, and on the wide, black, polished window-ledge lay his white camellias withering at her side.

She shut it all from her sight, drawing the purple curtains closer about her. To-morrow! To-morrow! She would be his then, irretrievably—the successor of the ill-starred Hagar St. Maur. She shuddered. How little she had ever dreamed of such a destiny.

Suddenly, betwixt her and all else rose up the face of John Calvert—that clear-cut powerful face. She shut her eyes—she tried to put it away. In vain! He had wronged her; he had wounded her love—stung her pride into high rebellion—granted! and yet to the very core of that proud resentful heart of hers, Nathalie loved him still.

A hot tear fell down in the darkness on the withering camellias. She sat with her head bowed on her hand a long time, while the wind rustled the purple curtains, and sighed along the gallery. Starting at last from her stupor, chilled and shivering, Nathalie rose up to close the window.

A low faint strain of music echoed along the gallery, a sound like the vibration of some instrument, touched by a dreamy wandering hand. What could it be, at that hour, and in that place? The gallery was deserted, the rooms opening upon it unoccupied, save by Ruby and Mrs. Roberts, and Ruby had gone to bed ill, and Mrs. Roberts was not given to musical performances. Nathalie paused and listened. It was the tinkle of a guitar, coming from that black and gold chamber far down the length of the gallery.

Nathalie's heart gave a great bound, then grew still. Clearer and sweeter the sound rose up—it had taken shape, as it were—it was a prelude, a soft, drowsy, tremulous thing, half passion, half repose. Should she wake Mrs. Roberts? Should she call the servants? She fled along the gallery toward Mrs. Roberts's door, only to pause midway thereto, rooted in her tracks, for a

human voice had broken suddenly into the thread of the music, so full of unearthly sweetness, so unlike all other voices she had ever heard, that Nathalie stood frozen in a great unutterable awe. Soft and low as they were, every word of the song was borne to her ear as distinct as dropping water in an October calm. Liquid, "meandering" Spanish words they were—words which Nathalie could not understand, and she stood listening, until from out their dreamy labyrinths stole forth at last a plaintive snatch of melody in her own tongue:

"Lord Heron sits in his castle high,
Fair Rosamond lies on the shore below;
He loved to live, and she loved to die—
Which loved the truest, the angels know?"

A shrill twang, as of a breaking string, succeeded. The music died away in a hollow cry, which rang through the gallery with terrible distinctness. Nathalie could hear the fall of the guitar, and the upsetting of a chair, or some heavier piece of furniture, beyond the door of that dreadful room. Mad with terror, lest its vision should make a descent upon the gallery, she sprang to Mrs. Roberts's door, in time to meet that worthy lady, in nightcap and dressing-gown, just coming forth.

"Hush!" she cried, seizing the frightened girl in her arms; "don't raise an outcry—it can do no good. I heard it all. O, the Lord be good to us, Miss Lermond! I thought this dreadful thing had passed away, and now the very night before the wedding!—"

She drew Nathalie with her along the gallery as she was speaking.

"O, do not go in there!" cried the young girl, shrinking back.

"But it might be burglars!" cried Roberts; "anyway, we ought to see. You needn't come in, my dear. Bless me, what would St. Maur say?"

She unlocked the door, somewhat unsteadily, and shaking and shivering, Nathalie at her shoulder, holding the flaring lamp, looked into the haunted room. Yes, surely there had been a visitor, though it was empty now. A window, opening upon the balcony, stood open wide; the curtain was put back, a chair beside it was overturned, and there lay the guitar with its broken string against the wall, just as it had been dropped a moment before. Mrs. Roberts entered to lower the window and

curtain in nervous haste; then she relocked the door, and taking the lamp from poor trembling Nathalie, returned across the gallery.

"O," she sighed, under her breath, "what evil thing does this forebode for tomorrow?"

"What, indeed?" murmured Nathalie.

CHAPTER XII.

CLEAR and cloudless, with sweet earthy scents filling the air, and a round red sun burning up the mists of the marshes and the sea, dawned Nathalie Lermond's bridal morn. The ceremony was to take place at twelve, in the gray stone church, which stood half a mile distant, on a bare wind-beaten hill overlooking the sea. There was to be a grand wedding dinner given to a select few, but no further festivities, for both bride and groom seemed anxious to give the affair as little publicity as possible.

"Are you done?" said Nathalie, in a weary voice, as Marie moved away from the mirror.

"Not yet. Mademoiselle forgets her veil," answered Marie.

Ruby fastened it to the beautiful dark head wreathed in orange blossoms—poor little Ruby, looking like a snow-breath, but calmer even than Nathalie herself, in this hour of martyrdom. One tear, and one only, fell upon the spotless flowers.

"God bless you, darling!" she said, in a faint broken voice, passing her arms around the pale bride. "O, I do hope you will be happy with him, Nathalie—so much happier than you think now!"

With that strange apathetic calm that seemed now to have redoubled in her manner, Nathalie put her away, and rose up from the mirror. Was there ever such a white and queenly bride? More beautiful than I can tell, looked she, in those floating bridal garments of satin and lace, but it was a beauty that hushed the admiration on the lips—it was the beauty of a statue, warmed only with the breath of life.

"It is time to go now," said Ruby, "the carriage is waiting."

The bridal party swept down the stairs. The carriages had been standing at the door a half hour; Nathalie took her place mechanically.

Who shall say what thoughts were in her

mind as they rolled along the open highway to the church? Once Ruby saw her start, and look around her wildly. Was she debating the chances of escape at that late hour? O, what mockery of rejoicing was there that day in the singing of the birds among the beech woods, in the flowers budding, in the warm spring sunshine! The eyes of the two girls met—the blue ones full of misty tears—the dark ones growing suddenly calm and cold again. Nathalie sank back passive among her cushions; the last struggle had passed.

The doors of the gray stone church stood wide open: St. Maur was already there, waiting impatiently for the coming of his bride. Some few of the hamlet people were scattered along the side aisles, among whom the face of the old gude-wife McKenzie looked forth, with restless gray eyes. The sunshine fell through the stained glass of the windows in warm rich patches; some birds were singing in the low graveyard outside.

As Nathalie passed the inner door, some one who had been standing near it drew suddenly back. She felt the movement rather than saw it, and an indescribable instinct prompted her to lift her eyes. Leaning against the pillar of an arch, with his cloak upon his arm, and his pale set face confronting her like a spectre, stood John Calvert. For a moment his eyes looked straight into her own, not angrily, but with a sad reproach in their depths which cut her to the heart. Of all men, why was he there? Why had he come to witness that ill-starred marriage, the bitter fruit of his own folly and wrong-doing? Ruby started a little as she saw him, and the pale bride swept on to the altar, never faltering, indeed, but with a face whiter now than her bridal dress.

St. Maur came forward and took her hand, flushed and feverish. Never in all her after life did she forget the passionate remorse that darkened his face at that moment—his wild earnest whisper:

"God forgive me! Darling, I will yet make amends for all."

Cold as a frozen thing, her hand lay in his. Like one bound in the spell of some terrible nightmare, she suffered him to lead her to her place. The ceremony began:

"Wilt thou have this man to be thy wedded husband?" said the voice of the cler-

gyman; "to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of matrimony? Wilt thou obey him and serve him, love, honor and keep him in sickness and in health, and, forsaking all others, keep ye unto him as long as ye both shall live?"

No response fell from Nathalie's lips; they moved, indeed, but no sound—her voice had died within her. Like a lightning-stroke, there flashed upon her, at those words, a terrible blinding sense of the falsity of her position—of its unutterable misery. With a start, she half withdrew her hand from St. Maur's.

He caught it again, his face darkening. A dead pause. Every eye was directed upon them—upon the pale girl standing, voiceless and motionless, beside her waiting bridegroom. Slowly the clergyman repeated the question.

The last words had not left his lips when, noiselessly, out from the spectators around the bridal party, two figures, closely veiled, glided up to the altar steps. One paused there, throwing back her veil with a defiant gesture, and showing to all eyes a broad Scotch face, grim now with resolution. It was Alsie McKensie. The other figure mounted the altar steps, and tearing the bonnet from her head, went up to the astonished clergyman, and paused at his side, face to face with the bridal party, and the astonished spectators.

It was a woman, clad in some shining gray stuff, with a shower of magnificent hair falling in wild waves and curls far below her waist. The face was pale and wan, the eyes wild, and large, and lustrous, and fixed now on the livid face of the bridegroom, with a vacant wondering look. She raised one thin white hand, and laid it upon the open marriage service.

"Hold!" said this woman, in a voice that vibrated every corner of the church, like sweetest music.

One terrible oath broke from the lips of St. Maur. He dashed Nathalie's hand aside.

"Who?" said the clergyman, looking at the strange fair shape at his side, "who are you who interrupts this ceremony?"

"I?" answered the figure; "I am Hagar St. Maur—wife of this man!"

With the bound of a wild creature leaping upon its prey, St. Maur sprung upon Alsie McKensie.

"Accursed fool!" he hissed, through his set teeth. "You have betrayed me!"

A hand, stronger than Alsie's, cast him back.

"You mistake," said John Calvert, calmly; "I am your accuser!"

"And of what am I accused?" demanded the bridegroom, clenching his hands at his side.

John Calvert's face grew hard.

"The charges are three," he answered. "I accuse you of the attempted murder of this unhappy woman, Hagar St. Maur, eleven years ago, on your marriage night. I accuse you of casting the deed upon your brother, Robert Hendee, and of hunting him willfully to his doom. I accuse you of withholding all knowledge of this woman's existence from the world since that time, and of entering unlawfully into a second marriage."

A faint cry from the little group before the altar, and Ruby Hendee had fallen like a dead thing in their midst.

"I will answer none of these charges here," said St. Maur, sullenly.

"Then," answered Calvert, "this ceremony cannot go on. Those assembled here had best disperse, and you will do well to follow me."

They looked at each other defiantly—those two men. The bridal party were in wild commotion; the clergyman quietly closed the marriage service, and the pale fair shape that had stood before him the while, glided back to Alsie through the wondering spectators. Alsie stroked her long golden hair, as she might have done some petted child's.

"Puir leddy!" she said, groaning; "she has been mad these mony years!"

St. Maur turned on his heel.

"As you will!" he answered Calvert, with an air of desperate resolve. "I will return with you to the Hall—further than that I will not go. Come, Nathalie, our blithe wedding is over for this day. You shall hear the last of this accursed story, if you will."

He strode out of the house, first of all, and entered the carriage. The others followed him.

"What you have to do, do quickly!" he said to Calvert; "had you given me but a day longer, I would have foiled you—I would have been beyond your reach."

"No!" was the stern answer; "never beyond my reach, while you remained this side of the grave!"

They went back to the Hall, a far different company, indeed, from the one which had left it but an hour before. John Calvert rode in advance, his horse's flanks white with foam. He entered with the others, and stood with his hat in his hand, and his pale face turned steadily away from the still paler one of Nathalie. Alsie and her beautiful charge had followed. Grim and uncompromising, the Scotch woman took her station directly facing St. Maur, the maniac clinging to her, and looking from face to face with her large wild Syrian eyes. Nathalie, gazing at her wonderful face, and the frail exquisite outline of the figure, marvelled no more than it had so often been mistaken for a visitant from the other land. Alsie McKensie was the first to break the silence—caressing Hagar's golden hair the while, and looking straight at St. Maur.

"I maun speak the truth," she said; "and mickle glad am I to do it, for it has been a sair weight on my mind, and I wouldna fash mysel about it sae again for a' the siller o' this mon. It's eleven years agane, sin the night of the braw weddin', and Sandy, that's dead and gone now, lay sair sick at the auld mither's cot, and I asked my leddy—this puir mad thing—that was to be a bride that e'en, wi' satin goun, and red gowld in her hair, to e'en let me gae and watch wi' Sandy, while the dancing, and the feasting, and the music was going an, for the auld mither was sair worn. It was a clear starlit night, and I took the beach way, and down on the sands I saw Master Robert, who hadnna been at the Hall that night, ranting up and down, as if he were clean daft, wi' spurs on his heels, and his face half buried up in his great cloak. I wondered then how cam he there, when a' the ither folk had hied them to the weddin', and I wondered while I sat in the cot wi' Sandy. Aweel, it was 'nigh onto midnight before he would ha' me gae, and I ha' but just risen to wake the auld mither, when who should throw open the door and rush in, as if the deil himsel was after him, but St. Maur, wi' his face as pale as a kelpie, and his white ruffles, and his white hands, wi' the gowld ring on them, a' stained wi' red blood."

St. Maur interrupted the speaker, turning upon her with a fierce gesture; but meeting Nathalie Lermond's eyes, dark,

dilated, and filled now with an unutterable horror and loathing—he sank back against the wall. Alsie paused.

"Go on!" he commanded, contemptuously.

"Aweel," said Alsie, "he drew me out o' the cot, and his grip on my arm left its mark there for mony days after; and he told me, would I serve him that night, and swear to keep what I should see a secret, he would gi' me gowld and siller enough to make a great leddy o' me till my dying day. I was a silly lassie then, and a young one, and, moreover, I was like to die wi' fright to see him looking so, an' I promised. I went back to tell the auld mither and Sandy, and to carry them the red gowld pieces St. Maur put in my hand, and then, he brought this puir leddy into the cot, and laid her on the auld mither's bed, and her sstain goun was all torn and covered wi' blood, and so was her gowlden hair, and she had a great gash in her side, and the blood soaked through the bed; but no one dared to ask him who had done the deed. We bound up the wounds—the auld mither and I—and she moaned, so that we knew she lived; and when Master Gilbert had sworn us to all secrecy, wi' a dreadful oath, he told me I maun take the puir dying lassie, and gae away.

"I rode a' the long night, wi' her head on my knee, and no one wi' me but the mon that drove the horses, and whither, I didna ken nor care. At the gray dawn we stopped at a lone house in the woods, and the mon said I was to git down there wi' the leddy, and bide there until St. Maur cam. We had taken off her satins and her jewels at the cot, and the folks asked me no questions. St. Maur came the next morn, and gae me siller, and told me I must take care o' her until she died. I knew then that it was he who had done the deed.

"But she did na die. I nursed her long, and she came to hersel, and knew me, and one day, when she was sitting up for the first time, she asked me where we were, and where was Robert Hendee? And St. Maur cam in upon us, and there was a dreadful scene betwixt him and my leddy. and she said how he had tried to murder her, and how he forced her wrongly to marry him, and cried out and wailed for Robert; and after St. Maur went away, swearing and cursing, she just lay down burning

hot wi' fever, and from that day to this she has been mad.

"After a weary while, when I begged to see the auld mither and Sandy, St. Maur gie me the house at Coltonsleigh. I ha' kept my leddy there, and tended her, and kept his secret, too, though she would ha' her times o' stealing away, when I did na see, and o' coming back here nights, to scare honest people; and although I would na have told the story had not Mr. Calvert come to Coltonsleigh, and charged me wi' the keeping o' my leddy, and told me o' this second marriage, and threatened me wi' the law, if I did na gi' her up, I am mickle glad it is told, and that na mair o' St. Maur's siller will ever touch my hand again."

Alsie drew a long deep breath as she ended. Hagar was watching her intently with those wild dark eyes of hers, and with faint flushes of light flitting now and then over the pale spiritual face. The darkened soul was groping vainly after Alsie's voice. She raised one hand, at last, in a sort of vague despair, and gently stroked the Scotchwoman's cheek.

"Alsie!" murmured the marvellous voice, in a sad appeal; "Alsie!"

A tear fell down on the wild golden hair.

"She kens no one but me," said Alsie, brokenly. "I cannae be parted from her. Ye may do as ye will wi' me, if ye leave us together."

Mrs. Roberts came trembling and tearful, and knelt down at Hagar's side.

"O my lady!" she said; "my beautiful lady! Do you not know me?"

No answer, but that vacant hopeless stare.

"Come away!" she whispered, pulling Alsie's sleeve; "come away!"

Harmless indeed—one who never raved or jibbered, but still a maniac!

John Calvert turned grimly round and faced St. Maur. The latter spoke first.

"Are you satisfied?"

"Yes," with curving lips, "I have fulfilled my promise to the dead."

"And through you," muttered St. Maur, "his curse has fallen!"

"O," cried Alsie, "the story is abroad at Coltonsleigh, and in the hamlet, I maun say, it would be well to hasten from here."

St. Maur turned on his heel with a face like ashes, and went straight up to Nathalie—to the shrinking woman in her bridal

garments, who fell back, shuddering, as he approached.

"Farewell!" he said, "men have staked the world for love before, and—lost! Farewell, Nathalie! Whatever deeds I may have done that men might blush for, however dark my life may have been, I swear my love for you might have redeemed them all! If I raised my hand against this mad creature's life, it was in a moment of anger and revenge. She was flying to my brother—she was disgracing my good name. Farewell, Nathalie, think kindly of St. Maur!"

He caught her hand and lifted it to his lips. One kiss, that burned upon it long after, and then Mrs. Roberts had flung herself before him in the doorway.

"O Master Gilbert, where are you going?" she cried.

He put her away.

"Bid Ruby good-by for me," he said, with dark remorse; "poor little Ruby!"

Calvert went out with him. St. Maur beckoned for him to mount, and they rode out together on the open highway.

"Calvert," he said, leaning darkly towards him from the saddle, "you have been my arch-enemy! You have robbed me of the only woman I ever loved. If Nathalie Lermond can never be mine, neither shall she ever be yours! Let us settle this matter as becomes men."

John Calvert's face looked as if carved in stone.

"I!" he said; "I measure swords or shots with you—the assassin of a woman!"

St. Maur ground his teeth.

"Have I then forfeited all the rights of a gentleman?"

"In my sight—yes!"

He struck his spurs into his horse's flanks.

"Well, be it so! but if you think to escape me thus, John Calvert, you have reckoned without your host. Keep this as a token!"

A buff gauntlet, still warm from his fiery hand, struck Calvert's saddle-bow, and clung there for a moment. He thrust it contemptuously away. The next instant it lay in the gray dust of the road, ground down by the iron-shod hoofs, and he had turned him about leisurely, and was riding off toward the low hamlet on the shore.

St. Maur gazed at the gauntlet, then at the retreating rider, and a low laugh, un-

speakably bitter, fell from his lips. Then, slowly, and in an opposite direction, he rode away to the Fields.

The house had been thrown open, and the servants were making a holiday. Who among them dared question their dark stern master? He went directly to his room, and locked the door after him. Once the bell rang for Pierre, and wine was carried up, but that was all.

The day crept on apace. Nature, congenial with all existing circumstances, began to frown in sultry clouds as night drew on. The wind rose up with a warning cry along the sea. It was after the sunset hour that St. Maur came out from his room, and took the path to the shore.

Perhaps it was the chance of meeting Calvert there that impelled him. The sea fowl were screaming among the rocks; a few fishers' boats were coming in from across the bay, and the songs of the boatmen were borne fitfully to his ear. O, the dreary night-sky, and the cruel winds, and the unspeakable desolation of that sea!

St. Maur paused upon the sands, and looked out upon the angry surf-lines. His face was haggard and worn; the teeth were set, the brows knit darkly. Who can tell what thoughts stirred him in that hour—how that dark fierce soul rebelled against its destiny of ruin and disgrace? He had lost all—love, honor, fortune and fair fame. To-morrow meant exposure, degradation and the penalty of the law.

The thought of Calvert and of revenge died, somehow, away. Nathalie Lermond's beautiful eyes, with the look that he had last seen in them, rose up one moment between him and that black heaving waste of sea, and then faded into its gathering darkness. A fisherman was mooring his boat a few feet distant from where St. Maur stood. He turned abruptly, and went towards him.

"Andrew," he said, "what shall I give you for this boat to go to Coltonsleigh?"

The man looked up, and seeing who it was, touched his tarry cap deferentially.

"To Coltonsleigh, sir? Not to-night?"

"Yes."

"There's a storm brewing sir—a nor'easter."

"That does not matter," gloomily.

"Well, I'm sure you're welcome to the boat, sir; but I'd advise you not to venture on the bay to-night."

"Good advice, Andrew; but quite thrown away. I, too, am an old sailor."

The man unmoored the boat again, wondering what could send the master of the fields to Coltonsleigh that night; and he watched him as he pushed off from the shore, wondering still.

A wild sharp sheet of rain, stabbing like spears as it struck, drove Andrew into shelter. His boat and its single occupant were just then across the white bar. Stern and unmoved, St. Maur sat looking straight into the storm before him, fearing its dangers far less than those he was leaving behind, his dark curls blown away from his haggard face, his dark eyes filled with an unutterable despair.

Once only he looked back. Some vision of his wasted youth, his ruined manhood, his lost life, must have stirred him then—of all that might have been, that could never be. Vague pictures danced on the pitch-black night setting grimly in—Hagar's golden hair; Nathalie Lermond's eyes; Ruby Hendee's fair young face. He saw the lights twinkling on the distant shore. Evening fires were burning there, and happy groups were gathered around them. The wind howled like a demon. Higher and wilder rolled the white and ravenous sea; a lighthouse lamp mocked him from a distant point. What had he to do with peace, and love, and home-light more? He looked out into the storm, and darkness, and swift hurrying waves. They were all that were left him.

Andrew, the old fisherman, saw the little cockleshell of a boat when it crossed the bar; he saw it even beyond. Then the blinding rain beat down like a veil between. Midway to his door, he turned again, sweeping the low dark line of the stormy sea, with some whispered words rising to his lips. Nothing could he see now but black sky blended in with blacker sea. Again and again he strained his keen eyes to catch but a sign or signal, listened—to hear but the thunder of the surf. A night had settled too deep for his sight to pierce, and the boat was seen no more.

CHAPTER XIII.

AND how fared it the while with Nathalie? While St. Maur was tossing in his boat on the stormy bay, gazing back so hopelessly at the shore from which he was

speeded, Marie had closed the shutters, and drawn the curtains of her mistress's dressing-room, and departed therefrom on tiptoe, so afraid was she of disturbing the reclining figure on a low sofa by the fire, with closed eyes and drooping lashes.

But Nathalie did not sleep—far from it. She rose up after Marie had gone, and went to the window, sat down there, resting her head on her folded hands, and listening to the wind and rain outside. The events of the day had been so startling, and so strange withal, that, as yet, she could hardly comprehend them, only as a tired child knows that it has found rest; only as we think of some whirlpool escaped. A few grateful tears forced their way from under the drooping eyelids, a newborn thrill of youth, and hope, and thanksgiving had stirred her numbed heart into life again—that was all.

Of John Calvert's share in her deliverance, she thought incessantly. Why had he thus come to save her from her fate? Why had he pursued the mystery and the wrong to the root for her sake? What could she now be to him? O weak heart! Nothing, nothing—she repeated to herself a thousand times. Had he not deceived her? Was he not the betrothed—the wedded husband, perhaps, of Rose Galbraith? She had that in her hand even then which could convict him; she reread it again with a flushed cheek and curling lip—that false letter to Felix Carleton.

The door of the dressing-room opened softly, and Ruby Hendee came in—a poor pale little shape, with all the life and color faded out of the small pinched face. She knelt at Nathalie's side, and looked wistfully, tearlessly into her face.

"Are you glad, Nathalie?" in a whisper.

"Glad!—glad that I have escaped such a doom?"

"What will they do with him?"

"I do not know."

"How beautiful she is—his wife! You will be happy now, darling? You will forget him and his wickedness?"

"Yes," was the dreamy answer.

"But I," said Ruby, flinging her arms up with a sudden passionate cry, "I loved him!"

It was only one life wrecked forever—only a new version of a story as old as the hills. More would follow to blot it out tomorrow. So the world goes!

Lulled by the sound of the ocean's wind on the shutters, Nathalie threw herself on her bed, still dressed, and, in spite of a dull gnawing pain, born perhaps of Ruby's sorrow, she fell asleep.

She slept an hour. What was it that aroused her? Not the wind, surely; not the storm beating against the casement? Nathalie started up with a piercing cry, gasping for breath. The lamp had gone out, and the room was full of a dense darkness, surging thick around her, like waves of the sea—choking her, stifling her breath on her lips!

She flew to the door, and threw it wide open. What a sight was there! The whole dark length of the gallery, with its rare tapestry, its paintings, its black oak paneling, was wrapped in a sheet of blood-red crackling flame. Along the broad winding stairway a thousand forked and red-hot tongues of fire were licking up the carving and gilding, and creeping with hisses along the wall, cutting off all hope of escape down those broad stairs. Somewhere beyond that surging sea, over its roar, as in a dream, Nathalie heard the sound of voices and of shouting; then the black smoke, lifted for a moment by some gust of wind, closed slowly in once more, and the hot fire leaped after, and thrusting forth their hands at Nathalie, they drove her, shuddering, back into her chamber, slowly licking up her footsteps as she went.

In that terrible hour there was not a thought of self in the girl's brave heart. Its first cry was for Ruby, for the servants, and, more than all these, for the maniac Hagar. Were they all aroused? Could they be saved? She sprung to the window and threw it wide open. O that dizzy descent! With the hot flame at her shoulder, pursuing her with not an instant's reprieve, how could she ever make it? Yet it was hard to die so. She was young, and life to the young is always beautiful. The door of her dressing-room stood open—there was a refuge for a moment more, she flew through it, closing it behind her, and met Marie in her nightdress on the threshold, white with terror.

"*O mon Dieu! mon Dieu!*" she shrieked, "the house is on fire! Mademoiselle, we are lost!"

"Come," cried Nathalie, drawing her away, "there is a back staircase across the gallery—the fire may not have reached it."

"Ah, how can we cross the gallery?" sighed the poor little French maid. "See, mademoiselle, see what I have found!"

She thrust into Nathalie's hand something small, and round, and glittering. Even in that moment of deadly peril, Nathalie recognized it with a cry. It was John Calvert's lost engagement ring.

"Marie, where did you find this?"

"I moved a drawer yonder by the window, mademoiselle, after you fell asleep. It lay beneath it. Ah, we can never escape! We can never cross the gallery—we must die."

Not then. Unconscious of what she did, in the terror and bewilderment of the moment, Nathalie slipped John Calvert's ring to its lost place on her finger, and fairly dragging Marie after her, rushed out into the burning gallery. It was her last hope of escape.

How far she had proceeded—how many steps she had gained in the thick smoke she never knew. No staircase could be found. Groping blindly with her white hands—hearing Marie's shrill cries on all sides, as it seemed, and the roaring of the fire, Nathalie grew bewildered. She was stifled by the hot air, terrified by the smoke and flame girding her closer and closer in. Light and sense reeled.

"Marie! Marie!" she cried aloud in anguish.

Swift as a flash of thought, something leaped forward, cleaving the cloud in which they stood enveloped. She was lifted from her feet. Some heavy garment was thrown about her, and an arm, strong and stout as iron, hurried her breathlessly forward.

"Cling to me, Nathalie!" said a deep voice in her ear; "cling to me!"

For life or death! Everything else for a moment was forgotten. They had reached some passage now, for a draft of fresh air blew upon her. The stout arm withheld its hold, and, Nathalie, tearing the covering from her face, looked up into another face bending above her, smoke-begrimmed and haggard, but still the face of John Calvert.

"The back staircase," she cried, "can we not escape by it?"

"Great God! it has fallen!"

"O, must we die?" said Nathalie.

He caught her to him in passionate despair. The crash of burning timbers some-

where behind them, sent out a terrible warning. Leaping at a bound, a narrow chasm of fire which intervened betwixt them and a door just fallen from its red-hot hinges, Nathalie saw that they stood in Hagar St. Maur's chamber, in the black and gold room, on which she was looking her last forever. John Calvert shivered at a blow the glass door opening upon the balcony. Wind and rain dashed in.

"Quick!" he cried, holding out his arms towards her, with a face that was terrible; "the walls are falling!"

One wild cry that might have pierced the heavens, as to and fro swayed the huge framework of the burning roof and wall; then, blindly into the black space, sprang Nathalie towards those arms; close as death they clasped her; then, a crash, a pall, like midnight, settling slowly down, and Nathalie knew no more.

The prophecy of Hendee was fulfilled!

* * * * *

In a low room, with whitewashed walls and bright chintz curtains, Nathalie Lermont next opened her brown eyes to the light of day. There was morning sunshine on the floor, and a pleasant sound of bees humming in some vines outside, and through the parted chintz curtains she saw the blue glimmer of the sea, rippling and dancing in the sun, as calmly as if no storm had ever swept it. Ruby Hendee rose up from the foot of the couch on which she was lying, and came to her side. There were traces of tears on the pale cheeks and round violet eyes.

"Nathalie, darling," she said, bending over her, "are you better?"

"Better?" answered Nathalie, "I have not been ill."

"You were stunned by some portion of the falling wall, just as John Calvert leaped with you from the balcony. His arm was terribly crushed."

Nathalie raised herself up.

"Where is he?" she said.

"Here—with us all, waiting to see you."

"And Hagar, and Mrs. Roberts, and Marie?"

"Safe. Marie is mourning for nothing but the loss of her black curls. Mrs. Roberts has gone to the Fields. Nathalie, St. Maur is dead!"

"Dead! When—how did he die?"

"He was drowned," the poor pained little voice went on, hurriedly. "They found

the body this morning on the shore. He started for Coltonsleigh last night, and the boat was upset in the storm. O Nathalie, we can all forgive him now!"

Neither spoke for a long time. Nathalie's lashes were heavy with tears; that which he might have craved in vain while living, out of her divine woman's pity she gave him freely now. Ruby came at last, and knelt down beside her, and laid her curly golden head in her lap.

"Ah, Nathalie, the old Hall is gone! Do you remember that I used to ask you to build a villa like St. Maur's? You will, now. Darling, do you think you have quite forgiven him?"

"Yes, Ruby."

"But if you knew he had wronged you as you had never dreamed—that he had stooped to falsehood and treachery; could you forgive him then? I have been talking with poor Calvert this morning, and I think he wrote you letters, and sent the ring, and not one knew of it but St. Maur, Nathalie."

"But Rose Galbraith—" gasped Nathalie, in wild bewilderment.

"Rose married Felix Carleton long ago, and went abroad," said Ruby, quickly.

Was Nathalie awake or dreaming? She clutched at the darkest of all the skeletons in her closet.

"That letter to Felix Carleton—did he not write that?" she cried.

Ruby's face was half smile half tears.

"I am afraid not, Nathalie. He says it is a forgery. Some one must have slipped it into the cabinet unperceived. Darling, if you had only read the letter he sent by Alsie!"

O, the regret, the rapture, the penitence, mingled together in that moment! How the scales fell from her eyes! How blind she had been! How recreant to her trust! The royal head fell down on Ruby's shoulder.

"And I owe him my life now!" she murmured. "O, will he ever forgive me?"

"Yes," said Ruby, tearfully, "he will forgive you, and you will be happy!"

So, by-and-by, Nathalie went down to him, with white lids adroop, and tremulous red lips proudly penitent, and on her hand his ring.

He was sitting in a low easy-chair, in the little cottage whither they had been carried; his eyes closed, the pale face, strong even in its suffering, turned to the

sunlight, and one bandaged arm lying in a sling at his side. He heard her light footstep, and started up quickly.

"Nathalie!" he cried, holding out to her the one sound arm.

* * * * *

Love forgives and forgets. Mortal enmities cease with that which is mortal. Death cancels all this side of the grave! and looking up through tears, into John Calvert's true eyes that hour, with the sunshine falling over them, Nathalie read there a shadowy prophecy of—light born out of darkness—a love, a truth, a devotion, that, in all the years before her, was never, never to fail!

Long before the summer flowers faded there were orange blossoms tangled again in Nathalie's tresses. A new Hall stands to-day on the site of the old one. Sometimes you may see there, if you will, a pale golden-haired woman, old beyond her years, walking its terraces, perhaps, with the little dark-eyed heir—one whom all little children love, one who goes upon her daily way alone, patient, and sad, and still. That is Ruby Hendee.

Across the budding beechwoods, in the grand villa at the Fields, there is another woman, always closely attended, golden-haired, too, and gloriously beautiful, watched over by a tall Scotchwoman, with a strong face and keen eyes, whom they call Alsie. You will see them in the great rooms, or the garden paths, where, all day long, sometimes, the fair-haired one will wander listlessly, counting the petals of flowers, or staring vacantly into space. That is Hagar St. Maur.

In the yard of that gray stone church upon the hill there is a grave, swept by the sea winds, with a shaft of marble at its head, a name and a date. It is carefully enclosed. Shrubbery has been planted around it—daisies creep around the stone; and there, silently under the Heaven that avenges and forgives, lies one, heedless alike now of the lives he has blessed or blighted—St. Maur!

"THE LITTLE STRANGER.": CHAPTER XII. CHAPTER XIII. CHAPTER XIV.

Fitzgerald, Percy

Ballou's Monthly Magazine (1866-1893); Apr 1873; 37, 4; American Periodicals

pg. 333

"THE LITTLE STRANGER."

BY PERCY FITZGERALD.

CHAPTER XII.

PEOPLE were greatly amused at Mrs. Forager's change of front. They said, moreover, that she had ascertained, on the first authority, that the estates were strictly entailed, and that "all the wit of man or woman"—or, she might have added, of the furious Mrs. Burton—could not divert it from its regular descent to Ned Burton and his family. Her difficulty, however, was that she could find no opportunities of conveying her cordial feelings and friendly advocacy to a single member of the family. After the coroner's verdict no one had seen them, or could see them. They lurked, as it were, in some remote corner of the house, shunning the daylight.

But as soon as these dismal legal proceedings were over, and on that very evening, when it had grown dark, a carriage came to the door, which was to take them away to the railway. They huddled down into the hall, eager to escape, as it were. But they were not to depart without one more trial.

"Stop!" said a voice. "One word before you go. Where, where is that—that murderer? O, he has skulked away into the carriage! Fetch him back, or not one of you leaves this. Call him in!"

The servants, hearing the sounds, were gathering on the stairs, looking over cau-

tiously. The wretched man had to descend from the carriage, and come into the hall again.

"Don't shut the door. Let them all hear. I wish every one to know what I have to say."

Ned Burton was standing in the open doorway. It was dark, and the moon was shining. His face was not to be seen. He waited, his head bent, like a prisoner hearing his sentence.

"I want you to know this, and take this with you. As I stand here, I firmly believe that you murdered my child. You fancy that you have escaped punishment because the law cannot touch you. Not so. From this moment I devote my life to hunting you down, to exposing and denouncing you wherever you go. You shall wish a thousand times over that you were in a jail and working out your sentence. There shall be no peace and happiness on earth for you or any of your accursed tribe. There; that is what I have to tell you and all here. Now go. Go, murderer!"

Ned Burton said not a word, and was turning away.

"Father! father!" said Tom, passionately, "you do not mind this furious woman's words. Tell her boldly that you are innocent, and defy her malignity. You can despise such unwomanly threats. It is like madness. Tell her, father, that we

know and believe in your innocence, and would die in defence of that faith."

But Ned Burton did not answer. He faltered out, indeed, something.

"Speak, dearest," said his wife; "answer this cruel woman."

There was a pause.

"He dare not," said she triumphantly. "He will tell you at home that he is innocent, but in presence of the murdered child's mother it is a different thing. There, go, all of you; leave me. See," she added, "even his own family are beginning to have doubts. My vengeance begins already."

She was gone, and Ned had not said a word. Tom and his mother looked at each other with a sort of wild glance. Somehow it seemed as though she left behind her a legacy of doubt and distrust, and that for the first time the terrible suspicion had arisen in their souls.

The ejected family were presently cast upon the great ocean of London. They found some small cheap lodgings out at Clapham, and there made steady regular preparations to meet the worst, which they knew must come. Tom's commission was sold—he was no longer a guardsman. The proceeds they could not consider their own, and the money was offered to Mr. John Burton, or to his solicitor, by whom it was contemptuously declined. They had now almost nothing to live upon. Ned Burton's younger son's portion had long since been spent, and they had large private debts. With a cold refinement of cruelty, it was intimated to them that the claims of account were suspended for the present, until these other more pressing ones should be satisfied. Then began a series of harassing operations—demands for statements of account—explanations—letters from solicitors—while all the time there were but a few pounds left to live on, which were fast melting away.

Tom Burton, on whom the whole burden rested, faced everything gallantly, and, what was not the least difficult of all, faced the misery at home—the crushed father, who literally "never raised his head;" the hopeless mother, herself making a gallant struggle; and the wondering children, who scarcely yet understood by what surprise of the laws of nature they had been turned out upon the world. Tom never relaxed his exertions a moment. He

sought out old friends, obtained promises that "something should be done for Ned Burton at the first opportunity"—which is, alas! so often the last of all opportunities—told their simple story to those whom he might judiciously unfold it, and at last came in one evening with joyful news. Something had been found—not much, certainly, but still something. This was the post of overseer or superintendent in a large factory at a small Scotch town. There was a chance of its being abolished at any hour, but still it was something.

"Thank God," said Tom, when he was alone in his room that night, "thank God for this, which gives us breathing-time! Now I can devote my soul to that one point—now that there is bread in the house, I can get myself ready to begin the battle with her. But how and where am I to begin?"

A hundred plans floated through his brain, but he knew not how he was ever to reach her. Yet some instinct kept telling him that one day he would, and he had to keep up this faith, not only in himself, but in his broken father.

It was the very evening before their departure from Clapham, when the maid came to say that there was a woman below who wished to see Mr. Burton. Tom went down to her, and found it was the honest nurse, Mrs. Donovan.

"I heard you were going away," she said, "and as I had to go myself, I thought I'd come and see you. God be with the poor innocent that's dead and gone, which had begun to be part of myself, but more of me is with the poor souls here. I thought you'd like to know that I never went with the cruel stories sent about—never for a moment."

"I am sure you didn't," said Tom, gratefully; "an awful punishment has come upon us all."

"Then as for her, there's allowance to be made, Mr. Tom. Think of her child killed in that sudden way, and a furious woman like her!"

"Don't speak of her," said Tom, in a low voice. "The day will come when she shall have to account for this wickedness. Let me not hear of her." Suddenly there occurred to him a strange inspiration, that here might be one of the helps to what he had been so anxiously planning, and that he should throw no chance away. "There

is more hatred to my father in all that," he said, "than grief for the child."

"Well, maybe it's not so much her as that cold snake of a fellow, her brother, that has no heart-blood or affections. He is the one that hates you all, Mr. Tom. He's working heaven and earth to see if he can't get the estates left him, and I declare if he isn't trying to make up to your lady, Miss Lucy. As for the poor old gentleman, many is the story that he has to listen to. They is at it morning, noon and night, filling his ears with some story about you all."

"All in good time," said Tom, involuntarily clenching his fingers. "It will all go down to his account."

"I believe it was he that put that notion about your poor father into their heads—I know it was."

"I can believe it," said Tom.

"I never liked him from the first minute," she went on; "he was always shut up there in that room of his, brooding some mischief."

"What a terrible day it was!" he said. "Was it not a cruel fate that I was not there, or that no one was present? In that great house, and with so many people about, to think that no one was at hand, or looking on, or looking out!"

"There might have been," said the nurse. "God alone knows. Depend on it, sir, he will call them forward at the proper time."

"There were people in the yard at that time, were there not? There must have been some one about. You are going back there, are you not, Mrs. Donovan?"

"Yes, for a week or two, sir."

"Then I conjure you and implore you, make this out for me. Something might turn on this, though I expect nothing. Still, you will do this for us, will you not?"

"You may depend on me, sir. I'd do anything for the poor captain, let alone so light a thing as that."

Mrs. Donovan went away, and left Tom still meditating.

"I should have thought of that before," he said.

They were now in all the excitement of moving, and in a day or two were established in their new abode. Friends had been kind; one, a grave legal one, had taken up the arrangement of their affairs, and had promised to see that no oppres-

sion was done. Things began to look cheerful, though nothing could raise the drooping spirits of Ned Burton.

"I am under a ban, Tom," he said, "suspected as a murderer. No one will ever believe that I am innocent, and I feel I shall go down to my grave disgraced, and my disgrace will come on my children."

"Keep your heart up, Ned," said his son. "I feel something too—that we shall soon make all as clear as day. Leave it to me. I shall move heaven and earth for that."

In a few days came a letter from the nurse to this effect:

"They are sending me away to-morrow, having no further use for me. I did not forget to do what you asked me, and you will remember, sir, what I said about God bringing all to light at the proper time.

"I was speaking to Jack Connolly the groom, who comes from the same part of Ireland that I do myself, when we fell to talking of that dreadful business, and I said I wondered that, with so many people always about the yard, no one had seen the poor child's fall. He said that he was in the harness-room at the time, but Mr. Ralph must have seen it, as he was sitting at his open window, writing, all the morning, and must have heard the flapping of the shutters. He says, too, that he rose up and went away at once. This is all he knows. But it seems very strange that Mr. Ralph should have said nothing at the inquest."

"I knew it," said Tom; "but why did I not think of it before? How am I to reach him, or to use this? It is hopeless. Still, why did he not come forward and say something—say that he had been in the room? Yes," added Tom, aloud, and enthusiastically; "it proves to me that he could say something favorable, and that he prefers to say nothing."

He took long walks in the outskirts of the town, planning, and always planning; and at last one night he made up his mind to a scheme that promised success.

Charming Lucy Forager, alone, and abandoned to her scheming mother's reproaches, had but a melancholy time of it now. The amiable lady laid the whole blame of the failure on her "insipidity" and helplessness. "She had fallen between two stools, and she would never do

any good." Debating seriously within herself what was to be done, Mrs. Forager had arrived at the conclusion that nothing could be made of the Ned Burtons, and that they were "unlucky, root, trunk and branch;" that Mrs. John Burton was a young woman, and that an heir to Abbeylands "might appear one of these days." Under these circumstances her eyes turned with interest on Mr. Ralph, of whom his sister was notoriously fond, and for whom it was known she would do wonders. She was not long in opening these designs to her daughter, and she did so with a good deal of rude cleverness, insisting on her mortifying and unfeeling desertion by Tom. She repeated his words at parting, and with reason pointed to his abrupt departure. Our Lucy was a charming girl, affectionate, trusting in the highest degree; but a little emotional and sensitive, resenting anything in the shape of neglect or slight of her affections. Though she had given her whole heart to Tom Burton, she had a purpose and resolution that even her mother did not suspect, though Tom had found out and depended on these qualities. The first impulse, too, of a young girl who thinks that she has been "given up" is to show the offender what he has lost, and that others value what he did not. Therefore it was that Mr. Ralph was seen paying many visits to the little tenement, where it was said that he was received graciously. Nothing, too, could exceed the attentions of the family at Abbeylands, and it did seem as though Mrs. Burton was trying hard to launch another poisoned shaft at the unfortunate family; hoping to wound her enemy, already bleeding, by hurting one of his children. Mr. Ralph had one little weak place in his nature—vanity, and an anxiety to distinguish himself in *affaires de cœur*. He was really in love with Lucy—so far as he was capable of that gentle passion—and had besides taken a genuine dislike to Tom from the first moment that he had seen him, and, with the malignity of a petty nature, had never forgiven the contemptuous fashion in which Tom had "put him down." He felt the superiority of the other, and longed to show his own.

Who knows what scheme was in that little head? Certainly not to marry this glib and fluent fellow; possibly to let him go on to the verge of proposal, or, more likely

still, she hoped that the news would travel far, and reach Tom's ears. Whatever the motive was, the Charles Hunters, the doctor, the parson, and the other official gossips—what would they have said had they known that the son of the proscribed Ned Burton had met the lone little damsel one day on her walk in the woods, to her joyful surprise, and had talked with her for two or three hours? That might have explained to them why her spirits had seemed to rise, and why she had appeared to enter into her mother's matrimonial schemes.

Mr. Ralph himself was not a little puzzled at her so frequently talking of the fatal accident itself, and at her undisguised curiosity about all the details. It was a subject, however, that he rather relished. But Lucy always sustained a theory of her own in the matter, and vehemently compassionated poor Ned Burton's fate.

"You are a great ally of the family, I know," said Mr. Ralph, a little provoked; "they are not worthy of any interest. As for that old man, he has had a narrow escape; that is all I will say."

"O, he is innocent," said she, warmly; "that I know. Nurse Donovan said so, and she knows more about it than any one."

"O, indeed!" said he; "has she been talking, then? We could not get her to say anything at the proper time."

"She was with them the other day, and has greatly comforted them. They have made some friends who are very sensible and sagacious, and who intend having the whole matter regularly investigated, and Ned Burton cleared. Mrs. Donovan remembers perfectly now that she heard his step close to the door, or heard his voice."

"O, they have won her over, have they?"

"Yes," said she; "it will be proved, we hope, that when the poor child fell out he was not near the window at all."

"O, they've trumped that story up, have they? Fell out, indeed! No, it came out just as if it had been flung out. If you had only heard the sound—"

"What! so you saw it?" said our diplomatist Lucy.

She fancied he was going to deny it, and added hastily, "So indeed they say. You were sitting in your window."

He colored. "How sharp we are, Miss Lucy! So you wanted to trap me?"

"Not at all," she said, in a soothing way—she was getting artful, was Lucy—"I really know so little of these things; but I am so sorry for poor Ned Burton!"

He looked at her curiously; but she changed the subject, and began to talk of something else.

CHAPTER XIII.

MRS. BURTON himself, it was remarked, had taken the loss of his child deeply to heart. Lucy had spoken some words of comfort which had been very happily chosen, and for which he felt a sort of gratitude. He liked to have her with him; and indeed it was hard to resist her engaging manners; but no one knew how often in the course of his walks he found his way over to the little mansion where she lived, and with her had many conversations. His wife knew nothing of this, nor indeed did Mrs. Forager.

Mrs. Burton, however, as the weeks rolled on, and as she got further away from the fatal period which had robbed her of her child, noticed an uneasiness or restlessness in his manner. But matters soon came to a new crisis, owing to a visit of consolation which Mr. and Mrs. Charles Hunter found themselves constrained to pay, on the earliest opportunity consistent with decency. There was a member of their household that went with them nearly everywhere, but which on this occasion propriety obliged them to leave at home, namely, "the boody." Lucy happened to be there when they came in. Mr. Hunter proffered the conventional offices of consolation in his best and most lubricatory fashion, gliding round and round them with his various topics, as though he were mounted on some well-oiled and noiseless velocipede.

The revengeful woman listened to him, and Mr. Hunter noted with some misgiving that her eyes measured him distrustfully.

"What do they say?" she said. "What do these gossips round about us say of that man—that murderer, as I call him—whom the wretched laws of this country have allowed to escape from justice?"

"O, they say it was a most strange and really suspicious transaction. Not by any means cleared up."

"And is that the mild view you hold also?

Not 'cleared up?' How tenderly and delicately put! And is that your view?"

This blunt question embarrassed Mr. Hunter. He could never bring himself to this brutal laying down a hard and fast line.

"O, it was shocking!—terrible!" he said.

"Did he do it, or did he not?" she asked, impatiently.

Mr. Hunter saw on one side a long perspective of well-garnished dinner-tables; on the other side the dullness and meagre entertainment of his own home. Lucy was present, which was exceedingly embarrassing, though there was nothing to be gained from her. Still it was awkward. However, thus driven in a corner, he said, gayly and boldly:

"O, of course. I fear there is no alternative."

Lucy colored, and looked at him scornfully from head to foot.

"You have given a different opinion to me. For shame! You, that I have heard, when he was master of this house, praising and paying court to him. And only a few days ago you spoke very differently to me. For shame!"

Not in the least disturbed by this attack, Mr. Hunter said, smiling:

"One cannot always speak the truth; it would be rude sometimes, and on that occasion unkind."

Lucy's eyes were kindling, and she answered excitedly:

"There is other proof besides what you think. There is a Providence watching over us, who will not allow the innocent to rest under suspicion. The time is coming when he will be cleared—that I know."

Mrs. Burton gave her a quick resentful glance.

"So you are setting yourself on their side. But it is easily explained. I know this much, my child has been foully murdered, and whoever looks forward to enjoying these lands can never do so without thinking that they have been stained with blood. But let them plot as much as they please, they will be disappointed."

"Lucy is not plotting," said her husband, timorously; "she is only trying to defend her friends. After all, God alone knows the truth."

"Yes, that he is a murderer."

"That he is innocent," said Lucy. "Your brother knows it, too."

Mrs. Burton started. "He! nonsense! What do you mean?"

"I mean that he saw it all—that he was in his room all the time; and why has he remained silent, unless it was that he knew if he spoke he would say what would be disagreeable to you? You can ask him."

In a moment Mrs. Burton had left the room, and presently returned with her brother.

"Listen to this," she said. "It is said here that you were at your window the day my child was murdered, and could have seen it all."

He colored.

"Who says so?"

"The family says so, and further, say they can prove it."

"O, Mr. Tom Burton, I suppose," he said, bitterly. "You are still on his side, Miss Lucy Forager. So they are scheming, making up evidence, it seems. Why should you meddle in it?"

"They simply want to clear their father's name."

"But is this true?" said his sister, impatiently.

"It is," said the other, coolly.

"You hear," said Lucy, eagerly. "I knew he would not deny it."

Mrs. Burton turned pale. "This is very strange," she said, "that you should have concealed this. It will make no difference in my opinion. You could have seen nothing. I suppose they have brought you round. It's wise of you to be currying favor with the next heir."

Mr. Ralph was not much disturbed, but looked over at Lucy with an air of reproach.

"I suppose," he said, "your friend Mr. Tom Burton has been made aware of this joyful news."

"He does know of it," said she.

"And I suppose will act on it. I think it would be highly imprudent on his part—I merely throw out the hint."

"Still," said Mr. Burton, "it seems hard that my unfortunate brother should not have every and all advantage, whether he be guilty or innocent. No one would rejoice more than I should that his innocence was established; it would take away half the bitterness of our loss."

"With me it would make it unendurable," said his wife, fiercely. "I can bear the loss so long as I know that they are

being punished. What is this trumpery proof of his guilt or innocence to me? He has a long account to settle, which he shall work out slowly, and which he has begun to work out in misery and wretchedness."

"As for that, Mrs. Burton," said Lucy, "you are mistaken. They have found kind friends, who have extended a helping hand to them, and have saved them from want."

The other looked at her steadily.

"O, indeed! then they are not starving in a garret in London."

"No," said Mr. Burton; "they are above want, and Lucy tells me Ned has got a comfortable berth in Scotland."

"Indeed!" said his wife, slowly. "This is news indeed. They will soon, no doubt, become prosperous, and their good name be restored, and then, when they shall have come in for their estate, the whole will have been long since forgotten. This they will owe to you," she said, turning to her brother.

"Perhaps yes, or perhaps no," he said, carelessly. "It might be better to let the matter rest as it is. But justice ought to be done even if the sky fall. I presume," he said to Lucy, "your friend Mr. Tom Burton knows of this discovery by this time, and will be forcing me to come forward and clear his good name. I shall do nothing but what I am compelled to do; and they had better consider this."

There was a quiet and almost good-natured indifference in the way in which he spoke these words, that might have made an older and graver mind than Lucy's feel disturbed. She, however, felt not a little triumph at having produced the effect she hoped for without offending him; and when she got home she sat down to her little writing-table, and wrote off to her lover the following eager letter:

"MY DARLING TOM,—All goes well. To-day the subject came about quite naturally when I was up at Abbeylands. I saw my opportunity, and started the little discovery we had made. The two were utterly confounded, and your uncle, who is really fast coming round, behaved nobly, and stood by our dear old Ned. She was furious. Ralph did not deny it, and, as I told you, did not seem in the least angry with me. As I understood him, he does

not seem to wish to be drawn into the business at all, but is willing to speak out if necessary, and clear Ned. I can see what is working in *his mean soul*. He feels that he has more chances in the future than in the present, and that he prefers to hold by those whose day may be coming than by those whose day is passing away. The grand point is that dear Mr. Burton's eyes are at last being opened. He is getting better, too.

"Now for a little plan that has come into my head. The Abbeylands flower-show will take place next week, when all the people about here will attend. It will be held in the large room of the schoolhouse, and in the garden attached. I know Mr. Ralph will be there, he is so full of vanity, and so eager to show himself. Suppose that you came here, went up to him before them all, and boldly called on him to speak out. He is a coward, and would be afraid to meet your eye, and from the very suddenness of your appearance would be thrown off his guard. We would have the groom that saw him at the window, ready waiting. He likes me, and would not be afraid to say what he knows. Write and say that you will come. O, I am convinced that our dear friend Ned will be set right in some way. Tell him I never can admire sufficiently his noble courage and fortitude under such cruel trials.

"Ever, dear Tom, your

"Lucy."

Such was our Lucy's plan. She was a very pretty, eager little thing, very engaging and inviting, but she had nothing of the diplomatist in her, and would never have negotiated a treaty.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE Abbeylands flower-show was one of those meagre affairs in the country which affect the heart of the visitor with a strange oppression. Such things are generally purely selfish affairs, got up by a few fanatical horticulturists who have greenhouses, and are eager to exhibit their "Mrs. Pollocks" and "Tom Thumbs," and, above all, to read their names in the local papers. "Mrs. Hawkins, as usual, took the first prize with a magnificent display of choice cut flowers. Her row of 'Mrs. Pollock' geraniums feasted the eye,

and would have made a Crystal Palace competitor turn pale with envy. It is a pity that these noble specimens of intellectual horticulture do not find their way to London, instead of wasting their sweetness on our desert air."

At Abbeylands, on this festive occasion, the schoolhouse presented quite a gay air. The large room was filled with rude tables, and several of those green sloping trays, which look as if they had been borrowed specially from the fishmonger, and turned to nobler and more elegant purpose. The flowers displayed, it must be said, did not warrant the enthusiasm of the local paper, and it would certainly have been injudicious to have incurred the trouble and cost of sending them to Sydenham, where it may be doubted if they would have received a cordial welcome by the authorities, or "Mrs. Pollock" accorded a gallant reception. However, various lengths of blue ribbon were found in festoons about the fishmonger's trays, with cards on which were neatly written, "Prize for best cut flowers, awarded ten shillings. "Prize, best inverted orchid, five shillings," and the like. A sort of extract from a neighboring volunteer band was performing in the garden, where a tiny bell-shaped tent, spoken of in the programme as "the judges' marquee," was pitched, having the air of a white bedroom candle extinguisher.

With these invitations to festivity, the company mustered strongly, the ladies dressed as lightly and gayly as they could contrive; each party proceeding from one fishmonger's tray to another, affecting an air of interest and curiosity, though they had seen the flowers again and again, in Mrs. Hawkins's and other greenhouses. It was pleasant to hear Mr. Charles Hunter lecturing gayly on those subjects, as he would have done on a geological or indeed any other kind of collection that might have been started. For you, Mr. Charles Hunter, in town and country, are never at a disadvantage where an exhibition of special knowledge might be expected to be forthcoming, and can talk airily on all subjects! He had a little dish of apples which he led away select parties to inspect, with a "You must come and see my pippins. I really think they might have given me a prize."

While the music was playing, and Mr. Charles Hunter was going through this process with Mrs. Forager and her daugh-

ter, who was flushed and excited, they suddenly heard a buzz of voices in the schoolroom, and sounds like those of an altercation. Some of the visitors were seen hurrying in. The excitement of the flowers was so languid that there was quite a rush into the house.

When they had got in, Lucy's heart began to beat, for there in the centre of the room, and the centre of a circle of people pressing eagerly forward to listen, stood her lover, Tom Burton, calm yet resolved, and with an air that showed he would not be trifled with.

"I ask of you again," he said to Mr. Ralph, "before these ladies and gentlemen, is this rumor true, that you witnessed from your window the unfortunate accident which has blasted my father's good name—I ask you, is this true, or is it false?"

"What right have you to question me in this fashion? You are disturbing this meeting of friends. We will have you removed if you do not leave this place yourself."

Taking no notice of this threat, Tom turned to the others and said:

"You hear him. You all know my father's unhappy story, how his good name has been destroyed by charges that no one dare make openly in court. This man, it can be proved—and this man cannot deny it—was looking on at the whole accident, saw the poor child fall from the window, and yet has kept back, when a word from him would have cleared my father!"

There was much astonishment in the circle crowding round at this sensational declaration. Lucy felt her heart beating. Tom looked so manly while thus throwing down the gauntlet for his father's reputation. Mr. Ralph was looking round, and saw her, and his face assumed a malignant expression.

"It is a curious idea," he said, "bringing this subject forward at a flower-show. It must strike you, and every one here, that there is something very inappropriate in the notion."

"You must answer if you have a spark of honor; deny it if you will, but answer."

"I think," said a clergyman, gravely, "the shortest way would be to answer the question, and finish this distressing scene."

"So be it then," said Mr. Ralph, carelessly. "Here then is my answer. I was

looking out when my sister's poor child fell from the window."

"I was right, you see," said Tom, looking round.

"But I did not come forward at the inquest for particular reasons. I did not wish to deepen the suspicion against your father. All I can say is that he was there at the window with the child, and *I see no reason why he could not have prevented its falling out.* There, you have it all out now. And I appeal to the company assembled if you would not have it out."

This was delivered with an air of simplicity and truth. Lucy felt her heart sink, and it flashed upon her that she was accountable for this fresh blow. Tom, bewildered and overwhelmed, could not say a word. Mr. Charles Hunter, seeing a graceful opening, now interposed, showing his "tact" in putting an end to a disagreeable situation.

He came forward. "I think," he said, "this painful matter had better be adjourned to some other time and place. I am sure I may leave it to the good taste and good feeling of Mr. Thomas Burton, who has received an answer to his question, to choose some other place for its discussion."

Tom replied, "You are right. This is only a fresh move in the game, and I shall go. But I tell every one here who heard what has now passed that this is a wicked organized plot, and that the truth will one day be revealed."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

"THE LITTLE STRANGER." : CHAPTER XV. CHAPTER XVI. CHAPTER XVII.

Fitzgerald, Percy

Ballou's Monthly Magazine (1866-1893); May 1873; 37, 5; American Periodicals

pg. 431

"THE LITTLE STRANGER."

BY PERCY FITZGERALD.

CHAPTER XV.

TOM BURTON, when he set off on this expedition, had wisely kept its nature a secret from his family. They were not therefore distracted by suspense. Indeed, for the sake of his wife and little ones, Ned Burton was still keeping up, and put on a brave front, though the wolf of despair was gnawing at his heart. The new friends he found in this fresh place overwhelmed him with kindness; they were a warm-hearted and rough people, and pitied this honest fellow, who, they had an instinct, had seen far better days. He was so frank, so straightforward, that every one felt sympathy, especially with his charming wife and children. Every one had agreed that "something was to be done for the Burtons," and it was soon found out that there was an opportunity. A relation of the capitalist who had supplied one post was going out to the colonies, as governor of some important place, and he had actually promised, when he came down on a visit and met Ned, that he would really try and see what he could do. When it is agreed on one side that "something must be done" for a person, and on the other that "he would see what he could do," matters may naturally be considered in a very hopeful way, and so indeed they appeared to the Burton family.

The great man, whose name was Sir Duncan Douglas, soon arrived, and Mr. Douglas, the generous capitalist, had got up a high festival in his honor. He had issued invitations for a sort of grand banquet, to which he had asked all the important personages in the neighborhood.

The capitalist lived in magnificent style, and the entertainment was to be worthy of his wealth.

Ned found himself looking forward with something like hope, and even spirits, to this meeting, and this idea of going out to a new country, and leaving all that miserable story behind, even though he had to begin life over again. He was in the prime of life, strong, full of spirit, and this struggle with the wilds and forest of a new

land was what he had often looked on with complacency. This would give him occupation, distract his mind, while he kept up that grand waiting and expecting for the day of justice which was to come sooner or later, when he would be cleared. His family were for the first time full of joy and hope, and his wife went with some excitement to the trunks, to choose out some of the old finery, to do honor to the occasion. They set off at last for the sort of castle where the feast was to be. It was a new place, but handsomely built and furnished.

When the Burtons entered, the room was full of company. The governor was in the centre of the group, on the rug of honor, and the host at once brought forward Ned to introduce him. Mrs. Burton, who had not lost her charming manner, which used to interest guests at Abbeylands, was made known to Mrs. Governor. The dinner began, and was magnificent, and indeed all seemed to the Burtons, though pretty well used to magnificence, like a dream.

After dinner, when some music was going on, the moment for confidences, a little concert was held—the governor, the host and Ned. "You shall come out with me as secretary, Mr. Burton," said the former, "with a good salary. You can bring your family with you, too. I can refuse my old friend here nothing, but at the same time I must say that I like you."

Ned was overwhelmed with joy and gratitude. Details were then gone into. Everything was delightful and promising, even to the long voyage, for our Ned, who enjoyed the sea and everything connected with it. He would have given anything to go over to his dear wife, and pour out all the joyful news. The lights, the flowers, the handsome objects scattered round the room, the beaming kindly faces, gave the whole scene an air of special softness, that seemed almost unreal. He himself found his old spirits returning, even his old power of joking, and telling good stories, of which he had a gift.

It was now about midnight, and a little

dance had been started for the young people. Ned was looking on at the "fun," and really enjoying it, when a servant came up and put a note into his hand.

He looked at it with some surprise. Who could be writing to him at that hour? An undefined feeling of doubt, and even alarm, began to steal over him. He opened it, and read these words:

"I have found out the corner in which you hid yourself, and have learned the pleasant arrangements your friends have made for you. I shall not allow you to impose on honest persons.

"At once, and on this night, inform them that you cannot accept their offers. I do not choose you to leave this country. Further, you must give up your present place. I shall make you wander like a hunted gipsey.

"Refuse, and I send up for Mr. Douglas, and tell him all."

A film came before his eyes, the lights seemed to grow dim. His wife saw his agitation from afar off, and with a sort of agony. She was beside him in a moment, and had read the fatal warning.

"It is of no use," he said, in a low tone of despair; "she wishes to destroy us, and to kill me. Let her. I give up now, and will make no further struggle. Let Heaven's will be done!"

"I will go down and see her. She is a woman, she must have some heart. I will throw myself on my knees before her—"

Now came up the host and his daughters. "We are going to have a game of romps, to wind up the night with. You must join; the girls will take no excuse. Come, lead him off."

Ned, with a ghastly smile, was led away. He was still as it were in a dream. The musical laughter of the children and young girls sounded strangely in his ear. He did what he was told. It was that diverting game with chairs, which are set out in the middle of the room, while the music plays, and the company walk round the chairs hand in hand, until the music stops abruptly, when there is a rush made to secure seats. It was attended by screams and shouts of laughter, but it was almost tragic to see the face of Ned Burton, who took his part in the revels, and mechanically joined in the excited romps.

While thus engaged, a pale stricken face appeared at the door—that of his wife, now returned from her wretched mission. She glided away to a corner, and sank upon a sofa. It was a strange thing to see her looking over at her husband, who was in the whirl and merriment of the exciting game, and always with that stiffened smile upon his face.

A servant now came in, and whispered to the governor, who seemed a little surprised, yet was not displeased. High functionaries are always exposed to the chances of these midnight interviews and expresses. And husband and wife both saw him leave the drawing-room with a pleasant air.

He was absent some time. When he returned the game was over; the space in the centre of the room was cleared; the players, exhausted and tired, were laughing in the corners. It was getting on to one o'clock, and some were stealing away to bed.

The governor looked round with a rather distrustful look for the host, and then walked straight up to him. They whispered for some moments, and then with a smiling air he looked round on the company, as if to give a gracious good-night, and went away to bed. Mr. Douglas, with a frown on his face, and with his hardest and most abrupt business manner, came over to Mr. Burton, and said he wished to speak with him in the study for a few minutes. Ned followed him. When the door was closed, he said, simply:

"It is all true, what she says, except about the child. My hands have no blood on them, but the rest is true."

"Then you have deceived, imposed upon me. It is a shame and a disgrace, to have taken in so kind and good a friend as I have been to you, and what I think worse of, to have allowed me to compromise myself with a man like Sir Duncan. He will never forgive me. I dismiss you from my service. I don't care to enter into the question whether you have done what you have been accused of or not. That is for yourself; it is nothing to me. But you have wormed yourself into my confidence, and imposed on me with a false story. And you have also made me impose upon a dear friend, who prides himself upon his reputation for sagacity. To have forced upon him a person like you, accused of such a crime! I can't bear to think of it,"

added Mr. Douglas, in great agitation. "You must not come near this house again; I do not wish to see you again; and I shall send you down what is owing to you in the morning."

He left Ned Burton. The unfortunate man, with his head bowed on his breast, took his way from the house with his more unfortunate wife. He made no complaint; he had made no defence or protest, a little to the surprise of his late patron. He seemed still to be stunned, as if by some blow. To his wife he was gentle and resigned, which, indeed, was some comfort to that good affectionate creature, whose first thought had been the terrible effect of the blow on him. When he spoke it was in the same resigned tone. His mind seemed as it were exhausted, just as the body might have been after some long weary day's walk. He seemed eager to lie down and rest, and above all, to be alone.

When they had reached home it was close on two o'clock in the morning. He said to her:

"You can go to bed, dearest. I should be only tumbling and tossing for the rest of the night, so I shall sit up a little. Besides, I want to think over our position. All this has come a little suddenly, and it is hard to know what to turn to next. Is it not extraordinary? What have I done to deserve this persecution? All my life I have tried to be good. As for the poor innocent child—but it is of no use saying anything now. It does look as if I was guilty, and that my punishment was coming on me in thick and heavy blows. Now go to bed, dearest. Leave me."

He was so earnest that she went, not wishing to add to his other anxieties that of worrying by opposing his wishes. Two such wretched hearts were not to be found that night in the little town, nor, indeed, in the whole of Scotland, for it was the wretchedness of black despair.

Ned Burton sat down at his desk, and with a sort of weary wonder kept putting to himself the same question—What had he done to deserve this Cain-like persecution? The day was beginning to break, but he sat on, still having that curious numbed feeling which prevented him, and it seemed would prevent him forever, lifting his heart, spirits, limbs. "O!" he said, again and again, in the same dazed and bewildered tone, "no mortal man

could resist such a continued oppression. It is something superhuman."

He then thought over all that he had passed through, even during the last few months; how he had suffered and struggled bravely, worn his very heart out in the contest, in the wish to keep up a brave front, for those above. There was a point beyond which human fortitude could not go. No; when he was thus given over to the fury of all that was evil and oppressive, it was time to yield.

* * * * *

Weary with watching, and herself oppressed with misery, Mrs. Burton waited long up stairs, until morning began to break. Then, overcome with the weariness that is born of grief, and which is as exhausting as physical labor itself, she at last, and against her will, dropped off to sleep. She did not hear the steps of him who stole up softly to look at her, and found her lying back in her chair, sleeping her weary sleep. Neither did she feel the lips that were pressed gently yet passionately to her forehead. Nor could she have heard the hall-door that was closed so quietly, as a figure passed forth into the morning air. The watchman, one of the three who were sufficient to look after the peace of the little town, told afterwards how he had noticed "the captain," as he was called, going out at this strange hour, and how he wondered what could be the meaning of it. But he noticed that the captain took his way along a road which led up to a lonely hill, outside the town, the top of which was always shrouded in a thick veil of damp mist, and where a few head of game sometimes lurked.

CHAPTER XVI.

OVER Mr. Burton the elder, ever since the misfortune that had befallen him in the loss of his child, had come a curious change. He seemed to have acquired more purpose of character, and to have taken up a more decided tone. He never wholly accepted the cruel accusation made against his unfortunate brother, and his voice was heard by the servants protesting vehemently against the malignant persecution. His wife grew more scornful and contemptuous, and more domineering, as she saw this new humor of his. But it was with something like alarm that she

heard him declare, one day, that his brother had been persecuted enough, and that after a time had elapsed the thing must be stopped.

He cared little for what was going on about him, nor did he notice, though others did, the change that was gradually taking place in his wife. She became more and more solitary every day, and his gardeners observed how she paced up and down for hours in a certain dark walk, formed of over-arching yews, which was at one end of their old-fashioned garden. After these promenades she would come into the house, and her husband would find her sitting with flashing eyes and clenched fingers, her chin resting on her hands. To Lucy, quite of a sudden and without notice, she had taken a deep and intense dislike; and this was revealed on the very day of the flower-show, when she, with her mother, had been invited to Abbeylands. Mrs. Forager had entered with "effusion," almost embracing her hostess, squeezing her hand.

"My dear," she said, "I heard it all. Such a scene! Seems to me quite a business for the police. No one could be safe, if people of this kind keep going about bursting into places where nice people go to. Every one is talking of the splendid way Mr. Ralph behaved."

Mrs. Burton's eyes were resting on Lucy.

"So you have declared yourself at last," she said. "You belong to their party. But if you have any prudence you will reflect on what you are doing. I give you warning. I shall spare no one. Those who shelter the murderer become accessories."

"This is a strange way to speak to me," said Lucy. "I am sheltering no murderer, and do not know of any murderer. What do you mean?"

"This is madness," said Mrs. Burton, impatiently. "For Heaven's sake, let us have done, for a time at least, with this miserable subject."

"My dear Mr. and Mrs. Burton," said Mrs. Forager, "you mustn't mind Lucy. She is talking folly. Lucy, I am amazed at you! And Mrs. Burton who has been so kind to us!"

"Let us say no more about it," said Mrs. Burton; "I am tired of all this. But remember what I have said. Those who are *not with me* are *against me*. I have marked them all, and shall mark them. The mur-

derer's friends are murderers. Those who favor a wretch who could throw a poor helpless babe out of a window to get an estate, are themselves guilty!"

All who were present looked at each other with wonder. Mr. Ralph interposed in a soothing fashion.

"My dear sister," he said, "you are only exciting yourself, thinking of these matters. It is all over now. It was a great misfortune, but there is no help for it now."

She turned on him with fury.

"You are joining the rest. You are all in a league against me. No matter; I am strong enough to battle against the world. In good time I shall reckon up with those who have deserted me. Not one shall escape—not one!"

All this was spoken in a flurried excited tone. Mr. Ralph was observing her closely, and with something like alarm. She passed out of the room at once, and word was presently brought down that Mrs. Burton did not intend appearing again that night.

Lucy would have gone away, but her mother had no intention of sacrificing a good dinner for such fantastic and childish notions.

It was a gloomy entertainment, at which Mr. Ralph alone was in great spirits. He devoted himself conspicuously to Lucy, and with an earnestness and seriousness that not a little alarmed her. His eyes were fixed upon her all the evening, as, indeed, Mrs. Forager noticed with an agreeable surprise. New visions of her own permanent settlement in these charming hunting-grounds rose at once before her. Lucy established here, after all, a handsome annuity settled upon them, an arrangement made by which the house, at least, could be diverted from the other Burtons, and she herself enthroned, installed, and eating excellent dinners like the present—this was the picture that rose before her.

Lucy, wearied with these constant attentions, had after dinner stolen away, leaving her admirer and Mrs. Forager engaged in some discussion. She found her way to the garden, and there among the flowers, on which she doted, wandered through the winding walks, thinking of those dear friends who were far away, and whom she could not help. How strange, she thought, how awful almost, was this struggle going

on between the two principles of good and evil, as it were, and carried on to the death! How was it to end, save in the death of one or the other of the combatants?

As she was thinking sadly over all this she heard a step behind her, and found Mr. Ralph smiling and hurrying up to her. She turned as if to go back to the house, but he stopped her.

"Just a few moments," he said. "I will not detain you longer. I have something of real importance to say to you."

"There can be nothing important that you can tell me," she answered. "I must go in."

CHAPTER XVII.

"WHAT!" said Ralph; "is what concerns your dear friends, the Burtons, unimportant? Have you no interest in the unjustly accused Ned Burton?"

"You should not allude to that," she said, "and it ill becomes you."

"What! you think I behaved villainously? Yet, consider this: it was all your fault. You gave me no choice. If you had not driven me to the wall, as it were, with your scorn and haughtiness, if you had only condescended to express a wish to appeal to me, I could have saved him that disgrace. I tell you," he added, hurriedly, "the thing is only beginning now. Look at my sister. You heard her to-night. It has become a monomania. It is all that she lives for. It is, in fact, her very life. It has come to this now, that she must destroy or be destroyed. It is shocking! She will not listen to reason. Some serious step must be taken, and at once, and it all rests with you and with me."

"Why, what would you have me do?" asked Lucy, wondering, yet not without a certainty of what was coming.

"Give him up. Take any time you like; it is hard to do it of a sudden. But I like you and love you, and have loved you so from the first. I would do anything for you."

He was speaking very loudly and very eagerly. They had approached that old-fashioned yew-tree walk, and were passing the entrance which yawned like the mouth of a cave. The moon was shining, and its light, passing through the branches of the

trees, dappled the ground with variegated yellow and black. Mr. Ralph was looking down on the grass, waiting for her. She gave a glance down the walk, and, to her surprise, saw a tall figure leaning sadly against a tree, and only a few yards away. Instantly an idea flashed upon her. She hastily turned aside out of the light. The figure never moved. With a loud tremulous voice she went on:

"And do you mean that you could tell the truth about this charge against Ned Burton? That you not only could but would, and that it all depends on me?"

"It all depends on you, Lucy. I can make his innocence as plain as that bright moonlight now shining. A few words from me would set him and his straight before the world; but I have my price, and you must pay me. You must have seen long ago, even from the first day that I saw you, how I was attracted by you, how deeply I loved you."

Lucy was glancing round nervously, and saw that the figure was in the same place. Ralph was a little surprised at the calm fashion in which she accepted his declarations, and, with some triumph in his tone, went on:

"You would be thrown away upon him, that cold-blooded didactic fellow, who would work out his father's good name as he would a problem in Euclid. Some one that knows the world is the person for you."

"No doubt," said Lucy, whose heart was fluttering, and who was longing for him to say clearly what she wished him to say. "But if I only knew that poor Ned could be cleared! You are in such awe of your sister, and depend so much on her, that you would not speak out."

"For you I would," he answered. "I would give up all for you; but you must give up much for me. Promise that you will think no more of that man. I will wait until you get to like me, and I swear to you that I have the means, by my own testimony, of clearing Ned Burton from the charge made against him."

Lucy glanced round again. She saw that the figure had drawn nearer, and had heard. Her first feeling was to rush forward, confront Ralph with this witness, and bring about an almost theatrical denouement, confounding and overwhelming him with the sudden apparition of the one

who had overheard this confession. But a sort of inspiration came to her, something whispering that this might be too precipitate, and that Ralph, made desperate by what he might think was a trap, would find some cunning device by which to rescue himself. She had determined to say nothing, but to get back to the house, contriving some excuse, for the other was impatiently expecting her answer, when her doubts were suddenly resolved. To her alarm, the figure rose from its seat and stood beside them. It was Mr. Burton.

"I have heard all, and it is no more than what I long ago expected. Thank Heaven for giving me certainty! I am no longer blinded, and I see at last the fearful conspiracy into which you and your sister were leading me."

The other was not in the least abashed, though at first a little surprised.

"I have been in no conspiracy," he said. "No one ought to know better than you the peculiar state of your wife, or my sister, if you prefer it. The extraordinary idea that has taken possession of her had to be humored. I was only biding my time, and at the proper moment would have spoken. I am ready to do so now, when and where you will."

Lucy answered him with some scorn.

"As you did the other day at the flower-show."

"I was driven to that, as I told you. You saw how my sister behaved. A little more, as Mr. Burton well knows, and her wits will go. The doctors have said so."

"Not to me," said Mr. Burton. "But this explains your behaviour. You find it time to trim your sails."

"I have no sails," said the young man, smiling, "nor do I know much about trimming. The whole truth is simply this: I was at my window in the study, at the other side of the courtyard, and I noticed that the veranda shutters of your brother's room were open. I had looked up several times, and when he saw me looking, he came angrily and closed them. About half an hour later they flew open, and the poor child fell out. No one was near it. And the next thing I saw was Ned Burton rushing across the room, and appearing at the window with his hands up."

"God forgive you for not telling this before!" said Mr. Burton, solemnly; "but I can make up for it."

"To be sure," said Mr. Ralph, with alacrity; "it is not too late. He has suffered a good deal, but all that will be forgotten. The only difficulty is my poor sister, whose morbid hatred I have been humoring. And the result is, as is usual in such cases, that I have pleased nobody and destroyed myself. I can assure you, Miss Forager, if I had not gone with her humor, she would by this time have been in a lunatic asylum. I leave it to any one here that has seen her conduct."

There was something very plausible in this statement. This ingenious young man had always the art of withdrawing himself with credit from an embarrassing situation. Even on Lucy came a feeling that there was some reason in what he stated. Suddenly Mr. Burton exclaimed:

"Let us return to the house at once and see her! All this must be set right at once, and at all risks!"

When they reached the house, they found a certain agitation on foot. The servants met Mr. Burton, and the steward, with some hesitation, said:

"I was looking for you, sir, to tell you that Mrs. Burton has gone away. She ordered the carriage about an hour ago, and went to the station."

"Went to the station!" repeated Mr. Burton. "What can she have wanted?"

Mr. Ralph quietly drew him aside.

"I can tell you," he said. "She has gone to pursue your brother. She was very excited to-day when she heard that they were established and flourishing. I am confident that she has set off to find them and destroy their position, wherever they are. She is my sister, but I tell you the truth. She ought to be followed, or she will do something wild and desperate."

There was a night train in about an hour's time, and by that Mr. Burton determined to proceed.

"It would be well," said Ralph, "if Miss Lucy could go too. Her soft aid would be of great use. Who knows what state of things we may find when we arrive?"

Mrs. Forager owned the propriety of this proposal, and she herself agreed also to go with her daughter. Before ten o'clock they were in the train, hurrying to the scene where Mrs. Burton had already arrived.

The mischief, as we have seen, was accomplished, and when the early dawn ar-

rived, and they had reached the little Scotch town, Lucy was the first to note a distant hill which overhung the place, whose summit was wrapped in a white damp mist. She little dreamed that the

poor victim of persecution was lying there stiffening in the damps of the morning, and the blood streaming from a fearful wound in his side.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

"THE LITTLE STRANGER."

BY PERCY FITZGERALD.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE weary night had gone by for Mrs. Ned Burton, and a cold, gray, mournful-looking morning had come round, when she started up from her uneasy sleep. She had been dreaming one of those dreams which leave a soreness at the heart, and a kind of dull aching. For a moment she thought her husband was about to come back to her, but when she had started up, and looked round and missed him, she gave a cry and hurried to the door. She passed down stairs to the room where she had left him. It had that lonely, deserted and disorderly air, which a room presents after its tenants have quitted it the night before and gone up to bed. It seemed like some old haunted chamber, suddenly opened after being undisturbed for years.

She entered fearfully, and her eyes then fell on a letter lying on the table. It was directed to her. With a wild eagerness she tore it open and read:

"MY OWN DEAREST,—Forgive me, but I can bear it no longer. I have concealed from you all that I have suffered for weeks past, and would have been content to go on suffering for yours and the children's sake. But after this last blow I can do no more. I dare not face anything else; I have no heart, no spirit for anything again.

"Do not think me cowardly, dearest, or that I have no affection for you in thus deserting you all. O, if you knew how I love you all, and how I wish that I dare live on with you and for you! But it must end now. This persecution is grown intolerable. Forgive, forgive me, dearest, this cowardice, and—good-by!"

She could hardly read the characters, but a sort of desperation made her finish. The room seemed to swim round her; she felt incapable of rising and going out to seek him. She sat there long. Then there suddenly came a loud knocking at the door, which roused her, and which in some way she associated with the terror that was on her soul. Starting up she uttered a loud and piercing cry, and fell back insensible.

Coming to the little Scotch town at that early hour after his weary night's journey, Mr. Burton found himself set down at the deserted station, shivering and desolate. A single porter was there, who stared as the party descended, for it was rarely that they had arrivals at such an hour. He was asked for Ned Burton's house, and offered to show the way thither.

They passed through the lonely little streets, a desolate procession. As they went along they could see that all the parlor windows were without shutters, and that inside could be seen the furniture—the chairs drawn back and disarranged, just as the family had left them some hours before.

Mr. Burton knocked, and as he did, there seemed to come back a sort of answer from within, in the shape of a wild and piercing scream. They all heard it distinctly, and the effect of that sudden cry, coming forth as an answer into the silent street, filled their souls with horror.

In a short time the house was roused, some servant rushing down to open the door. They entered, and found the mistress stretched upon the ground. No one could tell anything; no one knew anything. Just at this moment the watchman came pacing by, and stood in the doorway.

"I saw him go out this morning," he said, "and I can tell you the road he took. He went up to the Fell yonder, I suspect; and I wondered as he passed me, for there was a queer look in his eyes, and he tried to turn away his face."

Lucy was left with the still insensible Mrs. Burton, while Mr. Burton and the others hurried away up the Fell.

CHAPTER XIX.

It was now broad day. The early chill had passed away, and, as they hurried along, they met the laborers already going to their work. The road led straight up to that barren hill by a raw lonely path. They ascended for about half a mile, and presently found themselves on a wild moorland, overgrown here and there with stubble and

furze-bushes. They were not long in finding what they were looking for. In a little hollow, close beside a bush, lay stretched the hapless Ned Burton, ghastly pale, his arms extended, while from a wound in his side trickled slowly a stream of blood. Beside him was a small revolver. There lay the hunted victim of Mrs. Burton's enmity, and to this end, by her slow unrelenting course of persecution, had she brought the object of her hatred.

They lifted him, and for a short way carried him, after striving to stanch the blood. He presently seemed to recover a little, and looked round with dazed and wondering eyes. A little further on they met a carriage, in which they placed him, and then drove slowly back to the house. There he was carried in and laid upon his bed. The doctor came, hastily summoned. He shook his head as he saw the wound.

The day had now fairly begun, and the people were in the street, hurrying to their occupations. The sun was streaming in at the windows. The family were all gathered round Ned Burton's bed. The doctor had completed his examination, and turned away to speak to Mr. Burton.

"This wound is fatal," he whispered. "It is wonderful how he has survived so long. I cannot hold out the least hope. But he will recover his senses presently, and will not suffer much. See, he is becoming conscious already."

Ned Burton was opening his eyes, and looking round with a strange and bewildered expression on the faces gathered about him. At last he spoke.

"What is this? What does this mean? Ah, I understand! O, I have been a poor wretched creature, and have behaved like a coward!"

"No, no, dearest!" cried his wife, frantically, "it was not you. It was another hand that did it; that cruel wicked oppressor, whom you will live to see punished!"

"Punishment!" he said. "This is the way I have taken to punish her, by destroying myself, destroying you all—God forgive me!—and leaving the legacy behind me of this guilty act."

"Guilty? no, no! You knew not what you did. Your mind was too clouded with all this agony and sorrow to know what you were doing."

"No; as I lie here maimed, bleeding, dying, I did not. It seems all like a dream;

and yet, as I look back, I could not go through it all again. I could not live and be thought a murderer. It is hard that I should die in this fashion, and not have helped myself. Now, indeed, I have forever put it out of my power to clear myself. People will talk of the miserable wretch that threw his brother's helpless infant from the window, and then killed himself from remorse and shame. "O," he groaned, "what have I done that all this load of agony and suffering should be heaped upon me and mine?"

The light was suddenly obscured by a dark figure, that had come between him and the window. Ned Burton immediately raised himself on his elbow, and vehemently waved it from him with his arms.

"Take her away," he said, faintly; "she has come to exult over her work. Let her not come near. Let her have mercy at this moment!"

"Then confess!" said she. "All you who are here, listen to this. Look at the murderer of my child, lying there stricken down by his own hand. Who shall say now which is the calumniated, or who is guilty? Does that look like innocence?" she added, pointing to her foe; "or am I the cruel relentless mother that has fabricated this charge?"

"This is shocking—indecent!" said Mr. Burton, coming forward. "The time has come when the truth must be declared. A few hours more and my dear Ned had been saved."

"Your dear Ned!" repeated Mrs. Burton, turning on him with a contemptuous surprise; "has it come to that? What do you mean?"

"I mean that the least that can be done now is to repair the frightful wrong you have made my weakness aid you in doing. God knows, and God forgive me for it, that I firmly believed he had been guilty of this crime; but now I as firmly believe that he is innocent."

"Believe!" she said, scornfully; "but that will not do."

"I say this," he went on, turning to Ned, "for your comfort; but for the world there is yet more to be done. There is proof clear and convincing—a witness who saw the whole."

She started.

"Witness? Who—when?"

"Your brother here."

"Yes, sister," said Ralph, coming forward. "I am not the most scrupulous or immaculate of fellows, I know; but I am not brought so low that I can see a man reduced to this to gratify your dislike. As it is there seems to be blood on my hands. I never thought it would have ended like this. To my shame and confusion, I see here the victim of this terrible conspiracy. He is innocent. I say so here before all assembled, strangers and friends. I was at the window in the courtyard, and when the shutters flew open the noise made me raise my eyes—and—"

Here he hung down his head, and spoke slowly:

"And I saw the child topple over the window-sill—and—there was nobody behind or near it."

Every face in the room—and it was very full—was fixed upon him as he made this confession. Ned Burton's thin fingers were clasped together in thankfulness, his eyes looking up to heaven.

"It is true," went on Ralph, in whose voice there was an agitation none of his family had ever noticed before. "Take me to a magistrate and I shall swear it. My hands are clear of his innocent blood."

CHAPTER XX.

"As I stand here," said Ralph, "if I had known it was coming to this, or to anything like it, I would have died before having act or part in it. But what I have stated is the truth, and the entire truth. I know I have behaved like a wretch and a villain, and all I can say again is that, if I had known it would have come to this, I would have held back. Yes, sister, I would."

"There, dearest Ned," said his brother, "your good name is cleared at last. But what will atone for all the cruelty with which we have treated you?"

An expression of joy was spreading over Ned's face.

"Thank God that I have lived for this! O, that I could live longer to atone for my great crime, to ask pardon for the scandal that this wicked act of mine has occasioned! But this I can do, at least, heartily forgive her for all her persecution."

The dark figure came forward and stood near the bed, looking down on the enemy she had hunted so remorselessly and so long.

"You would wish," she said, "to live on, no doubt, in order the better to humiliate me by a long course of Christian forgiveness, overpower me with generous forbearance. I accept none of these stories. For me you are the murderer still, and always will be. Here is a father who can be content with this trumped-up story, and put up with the destruction of his child! I shall do nothing of the sort; but then I am only a mother, and have only a mother's feelings. You can all easily be stronger than I. It is a fine, a noble thing to have entered into this conspiracy against a weak woman. You, you, and you," she added, turning to her brother, "you vile, pitiful, crawling thing, who without me would have been nothing! But you have only acted according to your lights. You saw that no more was to be gained from me, or that you could get a higher price from them."

All were listening to the excited woman with awe and astonishment, there was such a wildness in her manner, such a restless fury in her eye. Ned Burton alone looked at her with indifference—nay, in his eyes there was an expression of hope and even satisfaction. She went on:

"But it is not finished yet. If I have to rove the world from end to end, I shall find vengeance—not on him merely," she added, pointing to Ned Burton, "but on those new enemies, whom one by one I shall hunt down. The spirit of my murdered babe has returned and charged me with this office. It comes to me of nights, and I hear it whispering now—'Strike! Begin this day to avenge me. Spare not one; show no mercy? I shall not, for have I not sworn?'

The doctor, who had been scrutinizing her narrowly as she uttered these ravings, now whispered earnestly to Mr. Burton. What he whispered was the idea that of a sudden struck every one who was there present. Even Ned Burton said, in a low voice, "Don't be harsh with her, poor soul. She is not accountable now."

He was right. All, as they turned to her, seemed now to understand the mystery of the vile passions which had so long controlled her. She had so entertained them that they at last had mastered her soul and devoured her brain. The crisis had come with that day's work, and in a few moments strong men were leading

from the room a struggling shrieking maniac. * * * * *

"O," said Lucy, passionately, as she knelt by Ned Burton's bed, "that you could try and live for the sake of all that love you!"

"O that I could!" said Ned. "Now that the clouds have passed away, life seems to have charms; but for a wretch like me, a stupid wicked criminal, there is but one fate. It is part of my just punishment that this happiness should have come when too late for me to enjoy it. Leave me now. I am too blessed as it is."

sent for by telegraph. He took ten minutes for examination and consideration, then came out into the next room, and with impulsive face delivered judgment, the wistful faces of wife and children being turned to his.

"I don't see why he should not get over this, though I should hardly have said so this morning. As he has got over it so far, I really think there is a fair chance."

Thus the judgment of the court below was reversed, on appeal. It was Lucy who rushed in to tell him this news, and she added, skillfully enough, a "rider" of her own.

"And it all depends on yourself, dearest Ned. You are not to look back, but forward; not to think of misery, but the happiness which will soon come. When you are saved and well, then there will be time to be sorry for this dreadful business. But the doctor says it all rests with yourself."

Ned raised his eyes in thankfulness to Heaven. Very soon came a refreshing sleep, and when the doctor saw him again, he said there was no need for him to remain, and that everything was going on well.

* * * * *

Some eighteen months after the scenes just described, the sound of wheels was heard in the avenue at Abbeylands on a fair summer evening. The lodge-gates were thrown wide open, and a carriage or two would drive up at intervals. There was to be a dinner party that night. The rooms were handsomely set out. The air was sweet with the fragrance of flowers, for the windows fronting the lawn had been opened, and the fragrance came sweeping in, having passed by many a rose tree.

For a year or so it had been noted that the rooms had worn a grim and gloomy look; no hands of tasteful women had been busy delicately arranging and ordering. Rich and handsome as was the furniture, it had the formal air of such things at some show castle or palace, where we miss the evidence of human direction.

During that short reign, no gentle hand had moved or even touched it; there was a stern seclusion in the upper rooms, or else a slow and austere progress across a rare passage, at a long interval, with perhaps a pause at the great windows, as the fierce and deadly eyes ranged the park, as it were

The little town which had been the theatre of such dramatic events was all astir with excitement, when it saw the new faces and figures passing in the street, and the general stir about the modest little house where the Burtons lived. The whole story was soon known, as well as the history of the mysterious lady in black, who had appeared among them so suddenly, and disappeared so carefully guarded. But for "the dying captain," as he was called, there was the deepest interest. Already the story had reached the newspapers of the large towns, and in the great leading journal there was to be read, "BY TELEGRAPH," a sketch of the story, pointed with "A Tragedy in Scotland," and enterprising reporters were seriously thinking whether it would not be worth while making an expedition to gather up the exciting details.

The whole of that day went by wearily for those gathered at Ned Burton's bedside, waiting the carrying out of the sentence which the doctor had found himself constrained to pronounce; but to Lucy, who kept careful watch on the face she so loved, came an instinct surpassing the science of the local practitioners, and while waiting the coming of the London doctor, who was expected in an hour or so, she would run from the room to her friends, and, with eager cheery voice, say:

"Ned will keep his word. I feel as certain of it as though it were revealed to me. He will try and live, and succeed."

Her bright face and these assurances, uttered with a wonderful confidence, at last began to inspire the others—even Ned himself.

About three o'clock arrived the great London physician, Sir Duncan Denison,

waiting till the figure of the detested enemy should flit past among the trees.

But on this evening all was changed. Everything was bright and animated. A gentleman sat on the sofa, drawn near to the window, and close to him stood a lady, fair and handsome, but with features a little worn, and hair a little changed in color. In her eyes seemed to linger a sort of nervousness, as though some old anxiety had not yet departed. The gentleman was young, but his figure was bent and delicate looking, and his hair was gray and even grizzled.

"Tom ought to be back from town by this," he said. "I fear anything like delay or putting off. Ever since that dreadful telegram I have lost all confidence, and—"

His wife lifted up her finger in gentle warning.

"Now, now, dearest! you promised, you know. We have both promised to look back as little as possible."

He smiled.

"I had forgotten. Ah, Lucy!"

The door was thrown open, and, in the midst of the children, Lucy came tripping in, looking bright and beautiful.

CHAPTER XXL

"Tom has not come yet," said Ned, "but he is only just due. He will not lose a moment, we may be sure. Tell me, dear Lucy," he added, with some hesitation, "you do not mind about your mother's absence? For your sake I would have tried to make her welcome, but after that dreadful season I could not bring myself to it."

Lucy looked down on the ground, then hid her face in her hands.

"Mamma is very good," she said, "after her own way. You don't know her, and must make allowance. She is easily led by others, and was brought up in a peculiar way. Her mother was all for the world, and taught her to think the same."

"To be sure. By-and-by," said Ned, kindly, "I shall try and not think of all these matters, and I am sure I shall be able to see her."

"She told me," said Lucy, in great confusion, "and, indeed, insisted that I should give you this letter. I told her that I would say all that was necessary, and that you were so good and generous, it was not in

your nature to bear malice. I told her this, and, and—"

Here Lucy, glowing and still looking on the ground, held out the letter in a timorous way. Ned took it with a smile, and glanced over it. It ran:

"MY DEAR MR. BURTON,—Lucy will bring you this and all my best wishes on this happy anniversary. God grant that it may be the beginning for my darling child of many more! As her wedding-day is fixed, everything will now go on well, I trust.

"Don't think I am the least angry at being left out of your party to-day. I am an old woman of the world, and have seen more life than most old women of my day. Don't mind making any excuses, as I know your good-nature and politeness will tempt you to do. Surely I know the truth, that *you don't like me*, and never did; no, nor never will. And I must say I don't blame you, for I know I had the look of behaving shabbily, and of deserting you when the storm came. However, think as badly of me as you like, set me down as a selfish old woman if you will, but don't let my little Lucy suffer. That is all I thought of the whole time. My time will be short here, so I bear no malice to any one. You are a young man, comparatively speaking, and—though I scorn to compliment you—came out well through everything. As I say, I can wait a little, and you will find that I can forget and forgive like a true Christian."

Such was Mrs. Forager's candid appeal, not at all unskillfully made. Ned smiled as he put it into his pocket. He felt for Lucy.

"Yes," he said to her, encouragingly, "we shall see her here by-and-by. There is Tom! I knew he would be in time."

Enters Tom now, eager and delighted. The handsome young couple had met again after a three weeks' absence. Again had he his hands full of presents, though when Mrs. Burton saw him opening the boxes and spreading them out, a sort of tremor passed over her, for it brought back the memory of another evening that promised to be one of the happiest of their lives, and which ended so disastrously, when he was displaying presents of the same kind. Indeed, there was a strange likeness in the affair and incidents of the whole night;

even as he entered one of the children called from the window, clapping his hands:

"O papa and mamma, here is Kiss-a-body!" such being the name in the family for Mrs. Charles Hunter.

In another moment those genteel and agreeable Pharisees were entering, cordial and smiling, Mr. Charles Hunter giving his host a significant squeeze of his hand, as who should say, "You well deserve all this. You have behaved nobly. I thought so all along," etc.

It was only these wonderful Charles Hunters that could perform a feat of this kind with consummate art. Ned Burton felt very much to them as he had done to Mrs. Forager, and on the occasion of this little home festival would have kept them at a distance. But they were not to be thus denied. He (Charles Hunter) who had so deeply sympathized all through, who had seen the end all along, who had discovered the true and generous heart, the fortitude and gallantry, and who had seen that truth must prevail in the end, he would overlook any danger of misconception, and at all risks felt that he dared not deny himself the happiness of being present on this occasion. In reality, as Ned Burton felt, there was no difference between his behaviour and that of Mrs. Forager; but Mr. Charles Hunter was determined such wholly different cases should not be confounded, and by his geniality and cordial sympathy actually made it appear as though the happiness of the party would have been incomplete without him. There are people in the world who can attempt these extraordinary *tours de force*, and attempt them successfully.

So on that evening. The party filed down to dinner. The sun was setting, and his departing rays came in athwart the garden terraces. Happy faces were ranged down the sides of that glittering table, though there was a tinge of sadness or uncertainty in those of two, at least. They were looking backward; the young people were looking forward, full of confidence and spirits. Gradually it darkened, and the lamps were lighted.

Then, much moved, Mr. Charles Hunter, who had really laid the company under obligations by his exertions to "keep things going," was seen looking up and down the table. Every one, even Ned, felt that he

was going to do something that was appropriate, and that no one else could do so well. He was there, they had an impression, as the mutual friend, the friend of the house for many years, which indeed he had been.

In a moment he had risen. He felt that on this occasion he might take the privilege of interpreting the thoughts of all present. He was not going to allude to what was past. He, with all the rest, was looking forward to a bright and happy future. The darkest hour, according to the pretty Irish proverb, was that before the dawn. When he thought of that evening when they had sat there on a similar occasion, and of all that had occurred since, it seemed like a dream. On that, however, he was not going to dwell. His reason for alluding at all to it was simply thankfulness. He wished, indeed, one was there to complete the charmed circle, one whom they all knew and loved, and who was away in foreign lands. But it was for the best, perhaps, that things were as they were. One day they would probably all meet again at that table. Meanwhile, there was youth, and love, and joy all before them. Within a few days they would be wishing joy on one of the most interesting occasions—he spoke from experience—known to the human race. "Miss Lucy," added Mr. Hunter, with feeling, "God bless you! Tom Burton, God bless *you!*"

Nothing could be better done. It answered as well as the real genuine article. Mrs. Burton felt her eyes filling up. Ned looked down the table, seated in his old place. It was, as Mr. Hunter had happily put it, like a dream, or perhaps nightmare. He thought of all kindly, even of the unhappy woman who was, panther-like, ranging up and down a small room in the asylum, where she was held in restraint, and where the physicians said she would remain for the rest of her life. But these gloomy thoughts did not remain long. A glance at the faces of Tom and Lucy turned his thoughts into a livelier channel. He went to rest that night full of a sweet and tranquil happiness.

A few days later came the wedding-day, when the heir of Abbeylands was wedded to Miss Lucy Forager, and when her diplomatic mother, attired in a mass of old flowered silk, her face beaming from a wonderful bonnet, greeted Mr. Burton with

her usual “You don’t like me, I know. Don’t tell me. I’m an old woman, and speak my mind on every occasion.” But Mr. Charles Hunter spoke his mind on the occasion in a very feeling way; and the happy pair departed.

They were, indeed, no conventionally “happy pair,” but really the happiest of

their generation. And within the year there were great rejoicings at Abbeylands, owing to the arrival—not of Mr. Burton, who pursued his lonely travels for many a year to come—but of what was pronounced to be the loveliest little creature that had ever visited the earth—namely, a new “LITTLE STRANGER.”
